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# **An Investigation Into the Use of Empathy in the Teaching of English Literature at Key Stage Three**

**Doctor of Education (EdD), April 2001**

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## Abstract

**Empathy** can be seen as a *crucial factor* in developing understanding of the world around us. The “ability to see something from a different point of view” has been associated with increased ability to understand literature, the moral development of children, and the development of positive personality traits both in adults and children. Investigating empathy, however, is difficult, not least because it is likely to develop over a considerable length of time, and may well involve *private* or even *confidential* conversations with a sympathetic audience or counsellor.

The following research began with an analysis of existing literature on empathy, ranging from that presented by practising psychologists to those engaged in classroom practice with children. The fieldwork began with an investigation into the *meaning* of empathy when it is used in the classroom with children in the formative years of their early teens.

**The Initial Study** examined teacher *perceptions* of empathy and sought to find commonality between teachers’ ideas and the literature available on empathy. It looked particularly at how teachers utilise empathy in the presentation of literary texts, and whether it helped the pupils to develop their knowledge of set literary texts. **Qualitative research methods** were used, allowing the focus to be the *learning process* in the classroom, rather than any end results. The research increasingly came to focus on the *pupil experience* of empathy in the classroom, and an **action research** programme was used to allow *spirals of activity and reflection* to develop.

**Action research** provided the opportunity to observe and become engaged in the processes which children use in order to *construct* their own knowledge about particular literary texts which they are required to “study” during Key Stage Three of the National Curriculum. Pupils were observed in their normal surroundings and classrooms, and the work progressed with the help of another teacher, committed to the improvement of her own practice through **collaborative action research**.

The findings indicated that empathy is difficult to sustain, and not always clearly understood by practitioners in the classroom. It can be viewed as a useful tool, which if carefully used can help learners to construct their own knowledge about a particular text. The study suggested that there is a need for teachers to review assessment strategies for work carried out using empathy as a tool.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### ***Why Study Empathy?***

Empathy, as a tool for the teaching of subject knowledge, developed during the 1970s, though most work on empathy and its relation to specific subjects has been in the curriculum area of History. It would appear that the real thrust of empathic response in the teaching of English Literature was itself a response to the demands of the dual certification of English at G.C.S.E. level (i.e. English Language *and* Literature). It seemed to be felt that empathic writing allowed the pupil to cover skills needed in order to “pass” English Language as well as English Literature at this level, with “pass” being defined as a level “C” or above. English Literature syllabuses were developed which had direct links with English Language in order to facilitate the planning of a unified course. Some of the coursework in such cases would be common to both syllabuses, and books set for the English Literature exam could also be used for assessed English Language coursework. This was an important development as the curriculum was extending at the time, and other subjects were gaining equal weighting with English and Mathematics and competing for time and financial resources. This attempt to combine aspects of the two awards seemed to create an increased interest in reflective writing in the first person, which often seemed to be award board led. For example, the Southern Examining Group (S.E.G.) dual certification syllabus demanded that there should be “substantial evidence of reflective writing, some of which should be presented in the first person”. (S.E.G. syllabus for dual award 1985) It seems likely that many teachers of English embarked on empathic teaching techniques, often with little or no staff development, and it is possible

that these teachers had widely differing understandings of, and levels of expertise, in the area.

The English National Curriculum Document (1995) requires that pupils should be taught to:

...Read accurately, fluently and with understanding; understand and respond to the texts they read; read analyse and evaluate a wide range of texts including literature from the English literary heritage and from other cultures and traditions.

(English in the National Curriculum 1995 DFE p.2)

At Key Stage Three, which looks at the requirements for teaching children between the ages of eleven and fourteen, the document went on to say that:

Pupils should be encouraged to appreciate the distinctive qualities of works through activities that emphasise the interest and pleasure of reading them, rather than necessitating a detailed line by line study.

(English in the National Curriculum, 1995 DFE p.20)

The emphasis of the National Curriculum on the received body of literature, and the further emphasis on a return to exam performance at G.C.S.E. and the introduction of tests at Key Stage Three, (formal testing in core subjects at fourteen, or at the end of year nine) came to be seen by some English teachers as an attempt to take control of the teaching of English and divert it from the route it had taken for some twenty years or so, during which the experiences of pupils were allowed to take centre stage in the classroom. The focus of this study is how empathy is used in the contemporary classroom, and to what extent it is understood by teachers. The contribution empathy makes to the pupil's ability to construct his/her own knowledge is also central to this research project.

On beginning this study, I had made the assumption that the teaching of English Literature through empathy was a positive aspect of classroom teaching. As the research

developed it became apparent that empathy itself is a complex concept, which can, if not properly understood, have as many negative as positive effects in the classroom. The early focus of the research was on teacher understanding of empathy. Later, I was able to explore the extent to which empathy helps pupils to actively engage in the construction of knowledge, by adopting a methodology which allowed the exploration of my own practice in the classroom.

As the focus of the research was on the processes in the classroom, rather than any end result, it was decided from the beginning to adopt qualitative research methods, which would allow the observation of pupils during their day to day activities, in their natural environment. As the early part of the research was an exploration into teacher understanding of empathy, and their expectations in asking pupils to respond in an empathic way to a particular text, the most appropriate research method seemed to be one which used non-participant observation, preceded by a series of interviews. During this phase there was some attempt to gather data from pupil responses by using group interviews immediately following the observed lessons.

As the research progressed, the focus became increasingly on the pupil experience in the classroom, and their own construction of knowledge using empathy as a literary tool for the exploration of character. Essential to this exploration was the adoption of an empathic teaching style which recognised the importance of the empathic modelling of behaviour. During the later stages of the research, my interest was in how empathy affected the experience of the pupil, and by working collaboratively with another member of the English Department, I was able to develop a programme of activities which centred on empathic approaches to teaching, and emphasised the importance of empathic modelling of behaviour. At this stage in the research it was decided that the most interesting data would be generated by looking at my own practice, and thus utilising action research methodology. For the purposes of this research, action research was defined as a “small scale intervention in the function of the real work” of the classroom, (Cohen and Manion, 1980 p.217). The research at this stage was also participatory with all team members being able to take part directly in the implementation of the research. In this way, the



research was allowed to develop through self-evaluation, and modifications and changes of direction were continuously evaluated within the spirals of the research.

Empathy, it may be argued, has a natural affinity with English Literature. Many popular texts, which are studied at G.C.S.E., centre on the idea of being able to see from another's point of view (e.g. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, or *Of Mice and Men*), while much literature may be interpreted as dealing with the seeking of reality, or universal truths. Margulies (1984) made a direct link between Keats, and his formulation of the nature of artistic observation, and psychological frameworks for understanding empathy.

Husserl's phenomenological reduction and Freud's basic rule of free association bear striking affinities to Keats's formulation of the nature of artistic observation. Keats's quest for the heart of experience illuminates a path through imagination and toward empathy.

(Margulies 1984 p.1025)

Margulies also offers a simple definition of phenomenology, which I believe is useful and pertinent to this study. Phenomenology can be defined as the study of man's consciously reported experiences, and as such forms an important and direct link to English Literature. Phenomenology seeks to develop methods to facilitate keeping the mind open to new ideas or possibilities. The artist needs to be able to continue to see new situations and possibilities in order to avoid:

...dangers of observational stagnation, the tyranny of ideas and the reduction to stereotypes and gimmicks.....His (Keats) struggle to articulate the creative process sheds light on the fundamental problem of seeking the reality, the truth of the other.

(Margulies, 1984 p.1025)

Keats's letters explore, from a literary angle, the creative process, and he traces his own struggle to find the truth of the other.

Keats himself wrote, “If a sparrow come before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel”, (Margulies p.1031), and we can trace clear parallels between what Keats was trying to achieve through empathy, and what those interested in psychoanalysis (e.g. Rogers 1975) have been trying to achieve. Keats claimed that a poet has no self, no identity. Rogers believes that a therapist must become a pane of glass, reflecting his client. Keats’s goal was to enter into and to share the world of the other in an attempt to find some truth. Rogers uses the term “the internal frame of reference” (Rogers 1975, p.3).

In order to come to some understanding of empathy, it will be necessary to explore the psychological interpretation of the term, while bearing in mind the importance of empathy in the process of creative writing, and the artist’s search for universal truth. We need to remember that:

Empathy is not merely a resonating with the other, but an act of will and creativity.

(Margulies, 1984 p.1032)

### ***Key Questions Identified***

From this general interest in empathy in the teaching of English, two key questions evolved:

#### **1. What do teachers of literature mean when they ask pupils to engage in an empathic way with literature?**

Implicit in this first question we can identify the following questions:

- What do teachers of English understand by the term empathy?
- What are teacher expectations and aims in exploring literature through empathy?
- What is the pupil experience of empathy?
- How are any outcomes assessed?

The second key question focuses on the pupil experience and his/her construction of knowledge:

**2. Does empathy help pupils to actively engage in the construction of knowledge, and how does this relate to the text being studied?**

Implicit in this second question are the following questions:

- How do we present a text in an empathic way?
- Does empathy lead to increased engagement with a text?
- Does empathy foster an understanding and appreciation of the different strengths a character exhibits?

These questions remained the focus of the study, though there were many emerging themes in relation to empathy and learning.

## **Chapter Two**

### **What Is Empathy?**

In order to investigate what teachers of English understand when they use the term empathy, it is necessary to try to reach some understanding ourselves of what the term has come to mean. This became increasingly important as the complexity of empathy was immediately apparent from the early reading. Empathy is seen by sociologists and psychologists to consist of a number of states, and it is only in the interpretation of these states, and their relative importance that disagreement occurs. Broadly speaking, there are two states or strands to empathy: the cognitive and the affective. There are various opinions about what makes up each strand, but there is considerable agreement that empathy is a process which contains emotional contagion, identification, generalisation, projection, sympathy and role taking qualities.

Interest in empathy can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century when Lipps (1909) applied the term “Einfühlung” to represent a feeling of togetherness (Deutsch and Madle 1975). Early researchers such as Lipps (1909), and Tichner, (1910), were not interested in studying empathy as shared feelings and the processes which might have helped to explain empathy were not fully explored, (Deutsch and Madle 1975). Lipps later developed his work and recognised empathy as a response to a person and a sharing of expressions. Further, he recognised that empathy might be partially explained by projection and imitation and this became a central idea for the researchers who looked at empathy later in the century. Certainly, the complexity of empathy was recognised at this time.

Kohler’s work of 1929 identified an empathic response as “an observer’s understanding of an individual’s affect alone.” (Deutsch and Madle, 1975). Kohler however, was more

interested in devising mimicry tasks in order to assess whether mimicry is a process allowing for the sharing of a motoric or affective state. It would seem that he was more interested in empathy as a means of explaining the sharing of affect, rather than understanding it as a process. This interest in mimicry was shared by Gordon (1934) and he devised a series of photographs which were presented to young adults who were asked to respond with a series of gesticulations. Thus, his early empathy study was an assessment of postural imitation and no distinction between the **self** and **other** was considered. It is this distinction which became important to the psychologists later.

This type of conceptualisation was pursued in the 1960s by Freud, Ferreira, Fromm-Reichmand, (Deutsch and Madle, 1975) and there was no distinction identified between the **self** and **other**. These studies regarded empathy as emotional linkage, beginning in infancy and being particularly relevant to the mother child relationship.

Interest in empathy as a process which leads to a more caring and compassionate society came to the fore in the late 1960s and the 1970s, though Mead (1934) clearly identified the affective and cognitive components of empathy and examined them in the light of cultural and environmental influences. He defined empathy as the capacity to take the role of the other. The growing interest in empathy during the 1960s and 1970s coincided with a reappraisal of our definition of culture (Bruner, 1989). Bruner identified a move away from strict structuralism to an understanding of culture which is derived from interpreted knowledge of the world. He believed that we construct our understanding of the world through “stories” and that it is our sensitivity to narrative which provides the link between **self** and **other** in the social world.

Much work has been carried out on the value of developing empathy for moral growth or development (Paolitto and Reimer 1979, Rogers 1975, Deutsch and Madle 1975, McPhail et al 1978, Straughan 1989, Bottery 1990, and more recently, Keseki and Berghammer, 1992 and Cooper, a,b,c 1997). Much of this work has emphasised the importance of the relationship between children and parents or carers and children and teachers. In the context of this research, there is a body of work, which looks specifically at empathy and

learning. Aspy (1973) links empathy clearly to excellence in teaching and learning, as well as to moral development. Daniel Goleman (1995) sees empathy as central to school activity:

Empathy leads to caring, altruism and compassion. Seeing things from another's perspective breaks down biased stereotypes and so breeds tolerance and acceptance of differences. These capacities are ever more called on in our increasingly pluralistic society, allowing people to live together in mutual respect. Schools have a central role in cultivating character by inculcating self-discipline and empathy, which in turn enable true commitment to civic and moral values.

(Goleman 1995 p.286)

While it is fairly easy to pick out sections from pieces of literature to support this argument, this would tend to obscure the fact that empathy is rather difficult to define (Cooper a, b, 1997), and a large part of the early research has been concerned with trying to recognise what it is that teachers of literature actually understand by the term empathy, and how it impacts on the pupil experience in the classroom. In examining the wealth of literature which is available on empathy, the intention has been to identify strands in the empathic process which may be most relevant to the teaching of English Literature in the classroom.

Kyriacou (1986) explains empathy as the ability of teachers to see lessons from the pupil perspective, and he identifies it as a key characteristic in effective teachers. This is a clear indication of the complexity of the subject, since Kyriacou is thinking in terms of teachers as role models rather than the use of empathy as a tool in the teaching of English Literature. From the beginning, it seemed likely that the modelling of empathy in the classroom would become an important aspect of this study.

### ***The Psychologist's Understanding***

Rogers defined empathy more clearly, describing it as a way of being in which you “lay aside the views and values you hold yourself in order to enter an other’s world without prejudice” (1975 p.3). Empathy has been of interest to psychologists as a means of effecting constructive personality change, or as a tool for use in counselling. Rogers (1975) saw empathy as probably the most potent factor in bringing about change and learning. It was Rogers himself who developed a very clear working definition of empathy, which I believe is a useful starting point for us in our concern to understand how children construct knowledge:

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto *as if* one were the person, but without ever losing the *as if* condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the displeasure of another as he senses it and then perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it *as if* it were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this *as if* quality is lost, then the state is one of identification.  
(Rogers 1975 p.3) (My italics)

This distinction between empathy and identification is an important one. Rogers believed that being empathic involved “temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it”, but in a non-judgmental way (Rogers, 1975 p.4). This confusion indicates the complexity of empathy and possible underlying dangers of misuse. Sound teacher understanding of the possible complications of empathy would seem to be essential for effective classroom use:

In some sense it means that you lay aside your self and this can only be done by a person who is secure enough in himself that he knows he will not get lost in what may turn out to be a strange or bizarre world of the other, and he can comfortably return to his own world when he wishes.

(Rogers 1975 p.4)

Identification then would mean that the subject was unable to move freely between the two worlds or states, and this could have a detrimental effect on learning. This emphasis of Rogers on the “as if” quality is important, and raises questions about the appropriate use of empathy in some circumstances, which became apparent in the early stage of the fieldwork for this study. For example, one of the interviews carried out indicated the difficulty of using *Timothy Winters*, a short poem, (see appendix 1), with children from particular backgrounds. If **identification** rather than **empathy** occurs, then this could have a **negative** impact on learning. A pupil may identify with Timothy in the poem and see his/her own family values under attack, or may suffer loss of self-esteem. Also relevant here is the teacher comment on the use of the “suicide note” in *Romeo and Juliet* which one teacher saw as a particularly dangerous task to set for young girls. Teachers need to be aware of the possible dangers in asking children to empathise when identification may take place. Gladstein too, identified overreaction as a possible danger inherent in empathy (1983), and believed that an element of distancing is always important. Whether or not teachers attempt to distance pupils came to form an additional focal point in the early fieldwork for this study.

Rogers (1975) developed his early views on empathy (1957) and ceased to see it as a **state** of empathy, but rather as a **process**, and a process which is clearly related to **positive** outcome in the broadest sense, i.e. from schizophrenic patients to pupils in the classroom. Rogers clearly views empathy as being a means to dissolve alienation, to help the recipient (in our study, pupils) to “connect” to the human race (1975).

### ***The Teachability of Empathy***

One of the important questions of the early stages of the fieldwork was how does the teachers` ability to empathise relate to its presentation in the classroom. Underlying this is the concept of the teachability of empathy. Further, if we finally accept that empathy is a useful tool in the construction of knowledge, can we teach teachers with low empathic



responses to be more empathic in their classroom work? Rogers (1975) believed that anyone, therapist or teacher, can be helped to become more empathic. Cooper, in her work on moral development and empathy, identified attributes of teachers who were seen to be empathic to their pupils (1997 a): teachers smiled a lot and looked happy, they listened to children, they talked to them, they used their first names a lot and responded positively to their attempts at work. Body language, she noted, needs to echo the tone of voice, supporting the overall impression created.

Aspy's study (1975) offers evidence that when the teacher is able to empathise with the children in terms of classroom experience, learning improves. He looked at reading skills, and compared the progress of children taught by teachers displaying empathic qualities with those who did not. His work has been replicated, for example, Aspy and Roebuck, 1975. Having first established, by analysing tape recordings of teacher responses that "teachers' empathy is a very powerful predictor of student performance in elementary classrooms" (1975, p.12), Aspy went on to look at classroom empathy on a larger scale. His study included 210 elementary teachers involved in humanising education. Each teacher submitted an hour-long audio tape recording of classroom teaching. This was then assessed by raters using the Carkhuff Scales for Empathic Understanding. It should be noted that while the Carkhuff Scale is more detailed and precise than other methods for assessing empathy, it is still open to interpretation. The Carkhuff scale is an attempt to define and recognise five levels of empathic response, in which level five is the highest and most empathic. Assessors need to be trained to relate response to clear criteria, and Carkhuff (1966) contends that a minimal empathic response would be one that is interchangeable with that of the other person. For example:

*Helpee*            I am feeling very alone.

*Helper*            You feel sad because it seems as though no one is there.

The helper's response reflects the feeling and the reasons for it, and can be evaluated as minimally interchangeable.

Assessors have to be trained to listen for both the feeling and the thing that caused the feeling in human communication (Aspy, 1975 p.11).

More recently, Huitt (1997) identified “empathic listening” as an essential tool in trying to develop an empathic environment, and he believed that such a skill could be taught and acquired. In its simplest terms, empathic listening is to pay attention to another person with empathy, which Huitt described as involving emotional identification, compassion, feeling, and insight. Active listening is where the listener repeats back to the person what it is they **think** he or she said in order to be certain that the listener understands. Another approach may be to ask how the person feels about the situation, or to offer a statement about how the listener believes the person feels:

For example, a student might say, “My dog got hit by a car this morning”. An active listening response might be, “Your dog got hit by a car?” or “Was it hurt?” Another response might be, “I can see this has upset you. Do you want to talk about it?” Whatever the response, it is intended to clarify the facts or information being presented (obtain understanding) and to identify and respond to the emotions and feelings of the other person.

(Huitt, 1997 p.1)

In terms of the focus of this study, the central issue about empathic listening in the classroom would seem to be when it can be used effectively. Huitt asserts that as a general rule all teachers have a right to teach and students have a right to learn. In other words, he questions whether empathic listening is always appropriate. Huitt highlights the necessity for teachers to be assertive as well as empathic in their day to day work in the classroom, since no pupil should have the right to engage the teacher in dialogue that is disruptive and therefore violates the rights of the teacher and other pupils. Huitt believed that there was a place for assertiveness alongside empathic response in the classroom:

The principle of empathic listening versus assertiveness is exemplified  
by my obtaining order first, getting the students back to work, and

then dealing with the situation in a way that did not disrupt my right to teach or other students rights to learn. Empathy is a very important and useful method of communication, but it must be used appropriately in a classroom situation.

(Huitt 1997 p.2)

Huitt's work adds an additional dimension. The process of empathy in the classroom needs to be tempered with other processes in order to ensure effective learning can take place by all pupils.

Cotton (1997) advocated training in interpersonal perception and empathic responding. This is where students (teachers) would take a cognitive approach, in which they learn what empathy is, how it develops, how to recognise different emotive states in themselves and others, and how to respond to others positively. This should enhance empathic perceptions and skills. She also highlighted the necessity of focusing children first on their own feelings, the different kinds of feelings they have and what feelings are associated with what kinds of situations (see also Black and Phillips 1992).

Aspy, (1973) like Rogers (1975), sees empathy as a **process**, and a means of **communication**. He attempted to relate it to common phrases, such as "I am with you", "I hear you", or "get inside of my skin". It is interesting to note that these are recurring phrases in many of the texts used in the teaching of literature at Key Stage Three and Four, for example *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in which Scout is constantly being urged to stand in someone else's shoes.

Aspy's work built upon Roger's early work (1957) and focused on the possibility of increasing teachers levels of empathy in the classroom. Using the Carkhuff scales for Empathic Human Understanding (Carkhuff, 1966) he found rather alarmingly that teachers were often functioning at interpersonal levels which were deteriorative to the construction of knowledge and that "learning rates diminished to levels considerably

below expectancy when the teacher provided low levels of empathic understanding in the classroom” (1975, p.12). Such research is interesting but the application of such a scale of measurement would seem to be more useful in a quantitative approach to fieldwork, rather than in the qualitative approach I was trying to implement in my work on empathy in the classroom.

If teachers have difficulty empathising with pupils at a basic interactional level, then it raises questions about teacher ability to successfully use empathic teaching as a tool in the teaching of Literature. It seems likely that at the very least, a teacher would need to be an empathic “audience person” (Hogan 1975). Hogan believed that what is actually important is that the carer **seems** to be empathic and that it is a relatively simple matter to teach carers to **appear** empathic. If this is true, then it can be accepted that individuals can be taught how to foster and promote a non-threatening context for self-exploration and this may have implications in the use of empathy in the teaching of literature.

Hogan (1973, 1975), emphasised the difference between **phenotypic** and **genotypic** empathy, and his distinction is an interesting one. It would seem to imply that as long as a teacher is **phenotypically** empathic, i.e. displays all of the outward signs of being empathic, the outcome is likely to be the same as if the teacher were **genotypically** empathic. Conversely, “**trait**” empathy is rooted in the genetic factor and related to intelligence and early experience, and is unlikely to respond to training programmes. However, simulated, or state empathy, he suggests, should be easy to model. This is an important consideration for staff development within an individual English Department. His assertion “Whether or not a counsellor is in fact empathic is irrelevant, what counts is whether the counsellor acts as if he or she understands” (1975 p 17), is clearly significant. Hogan too, would agree with Rogers that it is possible to have too much empathy: “too much **genotypic** empathy may foster a tendency to **over identify** with the problems of others, entailing a loss of objectivity”, (1975 p.17). Whether or not this would have a negative impact in the classroom is unclear.

I have already hinted at the problems inherent in identification, but if Hogan is correct, then there may be a case for arguing that some pupils may be drawn into the problems of fictional characters, and that this could result in a negative learning experience. Pupils must be able to engage cognitively with a text, rather than just respond to it. Clearly this has implications in the assessment of outcomes, and may go some way in explaining Hogan's finding that literary achievement in a group of creative writers was impeded rather than enhanced by empathy (1975). Such an observation must therefore lead us to question whether, while concentrating on the process of facilitating interaction, teachers may in fact be stifling self expression. Hogan believed that while empathy was an important part of a counselling relationship, it might be negatively related to other important human activity (1975 p.16).

Empathy training has also been shown to produce positive outcomes in other areas (Haynes and Avery 1979). Training in empathy seemed to lead to an increased willingness to be open and self-revealing, and to be more sensitive to everyone's needs when involved in conflict situations. Herbek and Yammarino (1990) followed the fortunes of young adults who had undergone empathy training and found that better teamwork and greater job satisfaction were achieved by individuals following such training.

### *Strands of Empathy*

As long ago as 1934, Mead recognised that while empathy is an essential social tool related to the development of self consciousness, there are actually two **strands** or **processes** involved in the empathic response, (Mead 1934, see also Hogan 1975). There is much agreement that there is a **cognitive** process and an **affective** process, though there continues to be disagreement about which is the more influential and which is the more relevant to learning. It would seem likely that the usefulness of empathy as a learning tool is dependent on a cognitive response, and so we can argue that there is undoubtedly an intellectual component to empathy. Mead first identified this in 1934 and expressed the opinion that "role taking ability...is the 'g' factor in intelligence". Hogan too

believed that there is no doubt that there is an intellectual component to empathy and indeed, once it has emerged in children it provides a basis for a child's sense of justice (1975). This can be related directly to the development of self consciousness, or what Mead described as the element which makes us fully human, and which is dependent on the ability to regard oneself from the perspective of others we are involved with.

What emerges through the literature of psychology journals is that there are specific aspects of empathy which can be put to use in the classroom, but it is clear from the early fieldwork that the teachers interviewed saw empathy in very general terms. Clearly there are common strands. Teachers recognised empathy as sensitivity to the felt meanings of another. They had the idea that it means moving about in their lives, and being able to lay aside the views and values that they hold. But none of the teachers involved in the interviews had considered empathy as a complex and powerful tool, which may actually be problematic in the classroom.

Consequently, whether we are functioning as therapists, as encounter group facilitators, as teachers or as parents, we have in our hands, if we are able to take an empathic stance, a powerful force for change and growth. *Its strength needs to be appreciated.* (My Italics)  
(Rogers 1975 p.9)

Carolyn Shantz (1975) also supported the view that empathy is complex, and that it is important that any practitioner is aware of this. She believed that empathy contains a cognitive element and she explored what types of judgement are involved in an empathic response. This could be an important factor in terms of teacher expectation and assessment. Shantz acknowledged that self-judgement and normative judgement are important in empathic response. Self-judgements are defined as judgements of how one felt, or would feel in the same situation. Normative judgement is the child's knowledge of how most people feel in a given situation or what a particular facial expression represents, (Shantz 1975). However, she identifies a third type of judgement, or

differential judgement, in which the child may judge how a particular individual feels in a given situation.

It is tempting to focus on the cognitive definition as this must relate to the child's understanding of how another feels (or how a literary character feels), though it is important to be aware of the "affective" domain or process. The distinction is an important one in the classroom. Do children who feel like Timothy Winters in the poem (appendix 1) actually gain any real understanding (or express understanding) of the feelings of the boy, or are they exhibiting what Shantz referred to as "emotional contagion" (1975)? Closely related to this is the problem of how reasonable it is to expect children to understand feelings that they couldn't possibly have experienced for themselves.

It seems to me that a degree of suffering is necessary before one can resonate to the suffering of others – as Shakespeare observed, "He jests at scars who himself has never felt a wound".

(Hogan 1975 p.16)

Indeed, recent comparative work on GCSE English results indicates that empathy occurs most readily between similar subjects (Blythe, 1996), thus it may be unreasonable to ask boys to empathise with Juliet, or Lady Macbeth. This might imply a process of **generalisation** (Shantz 1975), in which the child can identify how they felt in the past and assume that another similar child would feel the same. Linked to this is familiarity with the situation. The more familiar the pupil is with a situation, the greater the probability of empathic response (Ionnotti, 1975).

We may first want to question whether the pupil is simply transferring their own feelings and attributing them to others. This might be **projection** (Chandler, 1974), and not empathy, and would relate to the affective domain and not the cognitive.

Cotton, too, (1997) believed it is important to focus on similarities between oneself and others. Activities, which focus attention on similarities, would seem to be effective in increasing both affective and cognitive empathy.

If we accept the argument that generalisation, or projection, is more likely to occur with similar subjects, are we then able to ensure that cognitive empathy is engaged by increasing the dissimilarity? In other words, it may be possible for children to empathise with Macbeth in a cognitive sense, precisely because they have never experienced his ambitions and his dark desires. This is, of course, an interesting perception, and contradicts ideas discussed which would indicate that similarity is the key to true empathic response, and that indeed, a degree of suffering is necessary in order to empathise with a literary character such as Macbeth (Hogan 1973, 1975).

We have looked so far at the possible confusion of empathy with identification or association, and then with projection, but we have not yet looked at possible confusion with sympathy. In the purest sense, empathy can be distinguished from sympathy by its emphasis on the feelings of the subject (Ionnotti 1975). It is interesting that the third teacher interviewed during the early stages of this study used sympathy and empathy interchangeably throughout the interview. According to Ionnotti, sympathy involves the feelings of an observer responding to general circumstances of others. Perhaps the best way to distinguish between the two is to look at the role taking qualities of empathy. Rogers (1975) believed that sympathy involves “understanding about” another person while empathy involves “understanding with” the other.

### ***Role-Play in Empathy***

The emphasis on the role taking qualities of empathy is crucial to understanding empathy in the teaching of literature. This aspect of empathy was first identified by Mead (1934) and later by Rogers (1975). Rogers’s ideas of empathy involving *understanding with* are clearly expressed by Wispe:



In empathy I try to feel your pain. In sympathy I know you are in pain, and I sympathise with you, but I feel my sympathy and my pain, not your anguish and your pain.

(Wisper 1968 p.22)

Gladstein (1983) saw role taking as the ability to understand another's thinking or feeling, or the ability to perceive the world as the other person does. This is very similar to Rogers's definition. Emotional contagion (Shantz 1975) on the other hand refers to a person's emotional response while observing another person's actual or anticipated condition. So children who feel like another feels may not be understanding the feelings but only exhibiting emotional contagion.

Iannotti (1975) raises a further important point. If pupils are to actively engage cognitively with a text, is it sufficient that they correctly understand the other's situation? They need to be able to differentiate cognitively between their own and the other's point of view. A pupil must be able to assume the role of a character accurately, then be able to correctly predict what might have happened if various actions had been taken. If responses are based only on matching of emotional responses, then it is likely that the response is based upon projection or inferences from the situation, (Iannotti, 1975 p.22).

We seem to be coming closer to the core of the matter when we consider Weinstein's view:

...The individual must be able to correctly predict the impact that the various lines of action will have on other definitions of the situation...

(Weinstein, 1969 p.757)

Thus, we seem to be saying that we are asking pupils to understand the consequences of feeling/actions, rather than to simply reflect or respond to the said feelings/actions.

Such predictions may of course, be explored through role-play within the classroom, and we might find Gladstein (1983) useful here:

Simply stated, cognitive empathy refers to intellectually taking the role or perspective of another person. That is seeing the world as the other person does. Affective empathy refers to responses with the same emotion to another person's emotions. That is feeling the same way as another person does.

(Gladstein 1983 p.468)

It is interesting to note that Rogers (1975) in his later developed definition of empathy identifies both strands as equally important. While the distinction between affective empathy and cognitive empathy is an interesting one, it does seem that for the purposes of this study, it is necessary to take the view that empathy requires both an emotional response and role taking skills. Indeed it could be argued that by taking a strictly cognitive definition we are neglecting the importance of the affective dimension. Feshback (1975) has argued that it is possible to conceptualise empathy as a **cognitive** product, mediated by **emotional** factors, or as an **affective** response mediated by **cognitive** processes.

**Role taking** or **playing** is a skill which requires a high level of cognitive competence. Emotional contagion on the other hand does not require cognition. It should be noted that we are talking of role-play in the broadest sense, and that this can be related back to Piaget's decentring model of empathy (Gladstein 1983), though when we come to look at Heathcote (1984), we will be looking at **structured** role taking in the dramatic sense. Role taking can be seen as the "*as if*" quality described in Rogers empathic framework (1975).

Gladstein's proposal that we accept empathy as a multistage process is an attractive one (1983). While the emphasis in the early fieldwork may well be on cognitive response, empathy can involve emotional contagion, identification and role taking. Indeed Aspy

(1972) believed that in order to ensure humanism in education the **affective** domain must have equal importance to the **cognitive** domain.

To return to Margulies (1984), and his direct relation of empathy to English Literature, he ultimately unpacks empathy into four compartments:

- Conceptual empathy (**cognitive**)
- Experiential empathy (containing elements of **identification**)
- Imaginative imitation empathy (**imagination** and **imitation**)
- Resonant empathy (**affective contagion**)

Once again we have the distinction between the **cognitive** and the **affective** domain, but once again we have the acknowledgement that all four compartments are of importance to the process we have come to term empathy. Margulies emphasises the importance of the imaginative imitation aspect of empathy, as this is the active quality of entering into another's world:

A complex empathic stance is at once a passive, echoing experience and an active imagining of the unknowable of the other. Empathy itself emerges from the ongoing network of these competing and augmenting forces. When all is said and done, imaginative empathy remains imaginative. Empathy must be checked and rechecked against real experience if one is not to lose one's way and make a fiction of the other.

(Margulies 1984 p.1033)

In a simplistic sense, one of the purposes of this study is to reassess empathy as an approach to the teaching of English Literature, and to ascertain to what extent empathy simply moves pupils from one fiction to another.

Others have identified the usefulness of activities which call for children to assume the role of a fictional person and to act out that persons feeling and or behaviours, and have shown that they can be effective in increasing both affective and cognitive empathy, (Black and Phillips 1982, Underwood and Moore 1982). Increases in empathy are observed even when children are asked to imagine the point of view of an animal plant or inanimate object. Dixon (1980) believed that activities which focus on the lives and achievements of famous people or literary characters have been shown to increase children's desire to be like these people and to take on attitudes and behaviour associated with them. Underwood and Moore, (1982) identified role taking capacity as the basis for greater levels of empathy in older children when compared with younger ones.

Cotton (1997) identified the undervaluing of empathic role-play as a result of failure to accept character-related activity as an important aspect of developing higher order cognitive skills. There is an impressive body of research, which identifies such role-play in a positive way with academic outcomes. Bonner and Aspy (1984) identified significant correlation between student's scores on measures of empathic understanding and their grade point averages. Kohn (1991) found that where students are involved in active role-play designed to increase empathy, scores compare favourably with schools which focus on higher order reading comprehension. Gallo (1989) found that empathy training enhanced critical thinking skills and creative thinking. She identified role taking as a key feature of empathy training and believed that role taking:

- Fosters insight into different perspective and promotes genuine open-mindedness.
- Discourages hasty and superficial problem examination.
- Facilitates construction of more fully elaborated, and frequently novel, problem models.
- Discourages belief rigidity.
- Encourages cognitive and person flexibility.
- Practices persistent probing, engaged examination of an issue in alternation with flexible relinquishment and reflective distance.

Gallo 1989 p.112 –113

### ***Empathy Through Drama***

Margulies (1984) did not identify role taking as an important process in empathy, but his imaginative imitation empathy compartment would suggest that this is implied. Role taking would seem to be essential in cognitive empathy, and the idea that universals could be understood through role-play and empathic techniques was developed by Dorothy Heathcote, who was involved in teacher education for many years, becoming very influential in the field of education through drama. She worked across diverse fields of education, from infant schools through to community colleges in the North East of England. This makes her particularly interesting as it may be that her influence here, in this part of the country, the North East, is stronger than in other areas of the country, though it should be noted that upon her retirement, the University of Newcastle ceased to offer her Education Through Drama courses as part of its Teacher Education Programme. Heathcote (1984) based her work on empathy through role-play, and she perhaps provides us with a further concrete link to the classroom. Drama and role-play are identified throughout her work as central:

Drama is about man's ability to identify. It doesn't matter whether you are in the Theatre or in your own sitting room. What you are doing if you are dramatising is putting yourself in somebody else's shoes. Man's ability with which we seem to be born, of just putting ourselves instantly into somebody else's shoes and having a sort of total picture of how it must feel to be feeling like that person right now.

(Hesten 1995 p.3)

Empathy was at the heart of the teaching method that Heathcote evolved over some thirty-six years. Her principle concept of role was used as a tool right across the pupils learning experience, i.e. from cross-curricular learning situations to looking at the sub

text of a Shakespearean play. Like Margulies (1984), Heathcote accepted the artistic assumption that there is some inner, or universal truth.

Heathcote operated in a parabolic manner in helping to create awareness of a particular curriculum concept through enabling the revelation of some inner truth to be realised both by the teacher and the child. This inner truth was concerned with the condition of an individual view of an aspect of life. Often, universal truths were revealed.

(Hesten 1995 p.5)

Others working in the field of drama, such as Slade in 1958, had recognised that drama could be a therapeutic activity (Hesten 1995), but Heathcote alone developed systematic training programmes which assumed that teachers could be taught to empathise with pupils and they could then go on to help pupils view the world in an empathic way. Heathcote's methods were based on the "constructed interaction of the whole group", and it is this approach which seems particularly interesting in terms of the teaching of English Literature.

Heathcote's close links with psychology are further demonstrated by the fact that in the 1970s the Open University produced a video which explored her work in relation to the moral development of children. This video was part of a **cognitive psychology** course. Her work on child centred approaches to education can be seen as running parallel to Rogers and his work on Client Centred Therapy (1957), both based on existential learning. Heathcote's approach is important when looking at how teachers use empathic learning approaches in the classroom. Data collected suggests a significant difference in the very specific approach of Heathcote and the English teachers observed. Heathcote would allow the children to explore a situation in role, and then take them out of role before requiring them to submit a written response. Often, she would move the drama on by remaining in role herself. For example, she would put pupils who were studying John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into role, and they would be persecuted by an antagonist (a

teacher or facilitator – the class might even be hooded for this), but they would then be asked to respond to their experience out of role. That is, the written response (if indeed a written response was the main outcome sought) is not in the first person and pupils would use the expression “Christian finds himself constantly...” instead of using the first person. Out of role, the class would be brought to a realisation about their own journey through life, and they would respond out of role to the text.

In Heathcote, as in Rogers and others, there is a strong belief that it is phenotypic empathy that matters, and that teachers or facilitators can be taught how to empathise. It is the immediate response that is important. She believed that by learning to decentre, the teacher could acknowledge his or her own needs and limitations. The teacher has to learn to relinquish power in the classroom. Heathcote believed that the teachers main role was to create learning situations for others (Hesten 1995), and certainly we can accept this as being an attempt to allow pupils to use their own experiences in order to make sense of a text and create their own knowledge. Heathcote believed that the teacher’s main function was to create the situation in which learning might occur (1984).

In her writings on drama in the education of student teachers, Heachote tried to define educational drama as:

- Anything which involves persons in active role taking situations in which attitudes, not characters are the chief concern, lived at life-rate and obeying the natural laws of the medium:
  1. A willing suspension of disbelief.
  2. Agreement to pretence.
  3. Employing all past experiences available to the group at the present moment and any conjecture of the imagination they are capable of in an attempt to create a living, moving picture of life, which aims at surprise and discovery for the participant rather than for the onlooker.

In Hesten 1995 p.35

Heathcote's work with children attempted to engage both the **affective** domain and the **cognitive** domain, with the children responding in role (through imitative imaginative or contagion empathy) and then moving through a cognitive process when responding to a text out of role. At which point teachers move children in and out of role is likely to be crucial in terms of the learning experience and what is being achieved in the classroom. It would be true to say that her teaching and learning philosophy operated at its best in the affective domain, from which position her drama allowed insight through the cognitive area. It was the affective area which was at the heart of her teaching philosophy:

Because improvisational drama integrates and incorporates both hemispheres of the brain and blends cognitive and affective development, it allows students to exercise all realms of learning and growing and conceive of their world holistically.

(Hesten 1995 p.104)

### ***Empathy and Constructivist Thinking***

Recent work on empathy (Cooper, 1997 a,b, ) and Claxton (1988) has looked at empathy as an emotional and personal response. As previously, it is linked directly to effective teaching, (Kyriacou 1986), and reinforces the need for empathy in reflective practice. Schon, in his work on reflective practice (1987) refers to the need to understand the other and points out that if this is to be done successfully we need a strong sense of self and the ability to enter the other's world. Cooper's work focuses on the importance of phenotypic empathy on the learning process, and the need to seek in depth knowledge of the pupil in an emotional and personal way, alongside developing an academic awareness. Cooper believes that such empathy is more than a superficial awareness and connection. It needs to be determined and persistent, and involves looking for the positive in the most difficult of pupils. Crucially, while looking at empathy from a Constructivist view, such teachers not only watched their pupils carefully but they looked into the backgrounds and out of school interests as often as they could. Heathcote too (1984), felt that what the children brought into the classroom had to be valued, and her empathy through drama was



designed to promote cross curricular learning through which curriculum learning would be enhanced. She believed that such an approach would encourage a depth of feeling and understanding which enable the pupil to discover, or rediscover things which he/she did not know they knew:

....the centre of gravity was not so much with the child as with his engagement with the world he lived in....

(Hesten 1995 p.14)

Given the opportunity to reflect through drama, and through empathy, children would be able to construct their own understanding of the world around them.

The use of empathy, both as a tool for the teaching of literature, or as a behaviour model for pupils has not been without its critics:

Tate, (1997) commented, “ My initial reaction is often hostile, on the grounds that for a lot of the time what many of us need is a stronger sense of our own lack of self – worth.” It is worth drawing parallels with views expressed by Chris Woodhead, her majesty’s Chief Inspector, who has been cited as saying that:

Problems in the classroom were rooted in a collapse of social values, causing people to rely too much on therapists and too little on the protestant work ethic.

The school he attended 30 years ago succeeded by instilling a belief that pain and adversity should be confronted with courage...now teachers and pupils lived in a society in which there was a narcissistic preoccupation with the self and an ever increasing reliance on therapists and counsellors to bolster our own self confidence.

(Carvel 1997, The Guardian in Cooper, c, 1987 p.22)

Empathy is firmly located in a Constructivist approach to education, but as Mahoney identified (in Watts and Bentley, 1991), there are many theories which claim to define Constructivism, and it would seem pertinent to examine some of these and to locate empathy within them. Mahoney identified constructivism as:

A family of theories that share the assertion that human knowledge and experience entail the proactive participation of the individual.

(Watts and Bentley 1991 p.172)

Simply stated, Constructivism is the creation of our own conceptions of reality. The implication is that the construer is to a large extent in control of his or her cognition by reflection.

Watts and Bentley (1991), identified two main types of Constructivism, and then placed them against the background of classroom practice today. First, they recognised **strong** Constructivism and identified its characteristics:

- Cognitive Construction. Cognition results from proactive mental construction and knowledge of reality results from moving beyond and outside of the information. The emphasis is on **active, whole-bodied** form giving cognition.
- Constructive Process. Constructivism questions the concept of **learning readiness** and promotes the idea that there is not necessarily an established end point.
- Relativism. Knowledge is **transitory** and **provisional**. Knowledge is **modified** and **evolutionary**.
- Self-determination. Teachers commonly talk about **reflection**. Pupils too, must be able to recognise their own learning processes.
- Collegiality. Constructivism implies empathy as well as communication, responsibility, sharing and conservation. They are referring here to empathy as a means of creating a **safe** and **supportive** relationship.

A safe, caring and supportive relationship begets increases in explorations of possibility: these in turn beget phenomenological novelties, which entail opportunities to affirm more viable or satisfying styles of experience.

(Mahoney in Watts and Bentley, 1991 p.174)

- **Oppositional.** The individual affirms and qualifies meanings. One construction of events is compared to another.

Watts and Bentley, (1991) argue that such Constructivism does not exist at all in educational practice, and that what we see is some evidence, depending on the individual teacher of a much weaker version, or what they term **convenient** Constructivism.

Characteristics of **convenient** Constructivism include:

- **Start where the learner is.** While most teachers would express a desire to do this, Constructivism would suggest that there is no commonality and that for teachers faced with classes, there has to be some notional norm of class achievement, and this would rarely involve the conceptual state of the individual. At its worst, teaching of whole classes can be seen to ignore the differences between individuals, though most teachers would consider that they could make a professional interpretation of group needs. We need to remember that the relationships described by Rogers (1975) were one to one counselling relationships. It is unusual for teachers to get considerable one to one time with individuals, though Cooper (1997 b) did note that the empathic teachers she identified in her work were very responsive to the pupils and concerned with both a students personal and academic development, and able to value each pupil as an individual. It is worth noting that the expression “Begin from where you are” was coined by Slade, (Hesten 1995) as a result of his observation of the dramatic play of individual children. He regarded such a starting point as the one valid place from which the child could begin.
- **Linear Progression,** through orientation, elicitation, restructuring and application.

The learning environment must be structured in a way to encourage explication of

ideas and provide challenge. Pupils will be able to reconstruct understanding. Teachers have to provide the “scaffolding” (Wood 1988) and move the pupils further in understanding external to themselves. This will involve an element of sharing and communication.

- Design bridges or stepping-stones. The task of the teacher is to provide supporting evidence and recognise pupil’s readiness to progress. Education is seen as a journey.
- Forms of active learning – offered as the antidote to the blank slate view of learning. This can include a lot of the activities which currently go on in the classroom. Collaborative learning, peer group learning and empathic role-play for example. Most teachers would seek to use a variety of experiences to encourage pupils understanding.
- The teacher as facilitator. The teacher must organise the situation in which discussion can occur.

Essentially, it is the weaker, convenient Constructivism that is seen in classrooms. For example, there is a widely held view that the teacher is a facilitator and many teachers try to engage in active learning approaches. Watts and Bentley, (1991) point out that some subjects, such as history have developed in ways which encourage pupils to share ideas and to use skills such as empathy, but other specialisms, as they are interpreted in the National Curriculum, seem to move away from even this convenient Constructivism.

Frick (1995) recognised that this weaker Constructivism might be interpreted as little more than having a personal touch in the classroom.

When we look at empathy in terms of Constructivist thinking we can recognise the characteristics identified by Watts and Bentley across both types of Constructivism. For example cognitive construction can be recognised in the **role-play** described by Mead, and most of the readings on empathy have emphasised the role of cognition in an empathic response (Aspy,1972 Gladstein 1983). The Constructive process identified can be seen to be related to the work of Cotton (1997) who emphasised the importance of the process of construction to the success of the learner:

If we ask, “what are the characteristics of a capable, successful learner?” one view that is gaining increasing currency among educators is the notion that successful learners are knowledgeable, self determined, strategic, and empathetic...successful learners also have insight into the motives, feelings, and behaviour of others and the ability to communicate this understanding – in a word, empathy.

(Cotton 1997 p.2)

Coming to see learning as a journey too, can be related back to Heathcote, (1984). Drama used in an educational process was likened to a continual journey with built in inner paths for teacher and child, similar to the archetypal quest of the hero. The journey of course is never complete “and the process of becoming is always just beginning”. (Hesten 1995 p.5).

Heathcote’s views of the importance of role-play placed her firmly within the framework of Constructivist thinking. Learning is always active, and dependent on communication and the interaction of the whole group. Central to her own thinking was the idea of praxis, a concept adopted from Paulo Freire’s Cultural Action for Freedom (1989). Freire advocated the dialectical movement of action and reflection. Action causes reflection and reflection causes new action. Praxis then is purposeful activity. Drama or role-play in which a central concept was empathy became a tool in this purposeful activity.

The most significant contribution the system engendered in the child was self-motivation, self-actualisation and self direction. It encouraged a depth of feeling and understanding which enabled the child throughout the tension of the drama to discover things s/he did not know s/he knew. This latent experience was then made manifest.

(Hesten 1995 p.13)

In Heathcote’s approach the raw data experience of the child is acknowledged and is represented by the knowledge the child has in relation to the playground, the street and

the wider community. For example, carefully planned role-play centred on justice (*The Merchant of Venice* for example) can help to foster an increased understanding of the process of justice.

Heathcote clearly saw the teacher as the facilitator and her work with student teachers emphasised the importance of the teacher facilitator in the classroom.

This facilitator had clearly defined teaching roles:

- The deliberate opposer of the common view.
- The narrator who helps to set mood and register of events.
- The positive withdrawer who lets them get on with it.
- The supporter of ideas, as a group member.
- The dogsbody who discovers material and drama aids.
- The reflector who is used by the children to assess their statements.
- The arbiter in arguments.
- The deliberately obtuse one who requires to be informed.

Hesten (1995)

Each of these positions was meant to provide challenges so that different kinds of knowledge can emerge in the class.

Heathcote, in her later work with Gavin Bolton, questioned the readiness theory of learning, seeing it as setting limits on a students capacity and ignoring the Vygotskian observation on socially determined learning contexts.

For Heathcote, dramatic activity did not supersede direct experience. The fictitious world is actively construed and is a form of experience that permits submission and enhanced detachment.

### ***Main Points Summarised***

Empathy then is a complex subject. Its classroom use may involve active role-play in an attempt to give added insight into literary or historical figures, and it may involve engaging in phenotypic empathy to create an environment where children feel free to construct knowledge. I have tried to summarise some of the main points from the literature reviewed:

- Empathy is clearly a powerful tool that can be used in clinical psychology or in education. In schools it has a recognised role in developing moral growth (Paolitto and Reimer 1979, Cooper 1997 a, b, c.), and others have identified empathy as a quality which greatly enhances the pupil teacher relationship and is likely therefore to impact on the construction of knowledge (Kyriacou, 1986).
- Through the literature review, it has become quite apparent that while the focus of this research is the use of empathy as a teaching tool in the teaching of English Literature at Key Stage Three, it is important to recognise in addition the significance of the empathic relationship between the teacher and the pupil, and the extent to which low empathic responses can affect pupil learning. It would seem likely that in order to use empathy effectively as a classroom tool, teachers would need to provide an empathic audience (Hogan 1975).
- Some research would indicate that phenotypic empathy is what really matters and that teachers can be taught how to improve their empathic qualities in terms of listening and responding.
- Empathy is a multi faceted process of communication. However it is defined, it is recognised that empathy has a **cognitive** and an **affective** strand. This may be defined in terms of phenotypic empathy (which can be learned) and trait empathy (which is rooted in the genetic factor and related to intelligence), or in terms of types of judgement (Shantz, 1975), but clearly in the classroom it should be possible to observe empathy both in terms of the affective domain, and the cognitive domain, and it is important to approach field work with an open mind about the relative importance of the various strands in the empathic process. Rogers, (1975) in his final definition of empathy gave equal importance to the affective and the cognitive elements.

- Frameworks which recognise the complexity of empathy, are the most useful for us in terms of classroom work. Gladstein's view of empathy as a multistage process is particularly attractive (1983) since it allows researchers to take a broader view of the processes within the classroom.
- Using empathy in the classroom is firmly rooted in Constructivist thinking.



## **Chapter Three**

### **The Early Work**

Chapters Three and Four focus on the “Early Work” on empathy, carried out over one year with half a term spent in school collecting data. The aim of this initial study was to explore exactly what teachers of literature mean when they ask pupils to engage in an empathic way with literature. Implicit in this wider question are the questions:

- What do teachers understand by the term empathy?
- What are teacher’s expectations and aims in exploring literature through empathy?
- What is the pupil experience of empathy?
- How are any outcomes assessed?

Qualitative research methods were selected because they enabled me to focus on the natural settings of the classroom and develop my interest in “meaning” and perspectives. Non-participant observation was used to facilitate the observation of larger numbers of children and notes were taken throughout the observations. Qualitative research methods further place the emphasis on the process, rather than on an end product and theme analysis was particularly suited to the initial stage of the process, allowing themes to develop as the study progressed.

The purpose of the initial study was to generate data on teacher perceptions, and there was therefore a focus on interviews, rather than classroom observations which at this stage were restricted to two sixty-minute observations. Interviews and observations were across two schools to give greater breadth to the initial phase of this study. Group interviews with children were used in order to begin to explore the pupil experience of empathy.

The literature on empathy was extremely useful in providing directions for the early work in the classroom.

- The separating of strands identified in the process of empathy helped to focus observations and direct interviews. Related to this is Gladstein's view that empathy is a multistage process (1983). This in effect broadened the focus of the observations, allowing scope for examination of the various strands involved in empathy and other processes that occur in the classroom.
- The identification by Rogers of empathy as a process rather than a state of being, (1975) supports the broader focus within the classroom and his assertion that it is a process which is always associated with positive outcomes can be examined.
- Aspy's work on teacher/pupil empathic response is another important factor, (1973, 1975) and the extent to which teachers are able to empathise with their pupils is a rich area for observation. As the research was designed to look at the teaching of English Literature through empathy, it was decided in the early stages that one of the scales for measuring empathy, such as the Carkhuff Scale for Empathic Response described in the literature review would not be appropriate. For the early work in the classroom, Cooper's identification of empathic responses was a useful starting point (1997 a). Connected with this of course, is the extent to which empathic response can be taught to student teachers or trainers.
- The complexity of empathy and the difficulty of separating the process from identification and sympathy offered a further focal point for this early study. Teachers' understanding of empathy was the main focus of this early work. The point of interest was why teachers might choose empathy over a different presentation style, and misunderstandings and confusion about the term empathy will clearly affect outcomes in the classroom. The early research was an attempt to identify common understanding among teachers, and so a relatively direct question technique in the interviews was used.
- The importance of role-play, identified as a crucial factor in empathic response by Heathcote (1984), Margulies (1984), Rogers (1975) and others became a key factor in

setting up observations, as it meant that lessons could be selected which involved some form of role taking for observation. This would, it was hoped, provide insight into teachers' understanding of empathy through their presentation of it, and also provide insight into the pupil experience of empathy in the classroom. Heathcote's use of role-play is particularly relevant (1984), and her implied belief that the response should come out of role, and not necessarily in the first person gave a further focal point for the observations and interviews.

### ***Methodology and Research Instruments***

Much of the research which focuses on the application of empathy is quantitative in nature, focusing on the number of empathic responses, or attempting to devise scales to measure empathy. Cooper (1997 a, b,), looking at empathy in terms of the moral development of children, has used a qualitative approach including observations and interviews. Cooper set up a pilot project in a single inner city primary school, which involved interviewing teachers and children, and observations in both classrooms and assemblies. She interviewed sixteen children, though interviews were short, and as far as possible within one school, she covered a range of ethnicity, ability, age and gender. Four teachers were interviewed with a range of curriculum specialities and a further interview was carried out with one classroom assistant. Cooper was particularly interested in how empathy manifests itself in the classroom, and she was particularly interested in non-verbal responses. By her own admission, the number of "interactions and activities taking place in a classroom at any one time is huge, and the concept of empathy itself and how it is shown, is an issue in itself" (Cooper a 1997 p.8). Her work has been valuable in terms of modifying the early research, but her acceptance of empathy as a positive approach is evident. Her key indicators for empathic response were used, (teachers smiled a lot, looked happy, used the first names of children a lot,) in terms of looking at empathic responses in interaction.

Qualitative research methods were chosen because the focus of the study was on the quality of the learning, the process rather than a measurable end product, though empathy in assessment was not discounted. Qualitative research enables the researcher to:

- Focus on natural settings.
- Develop the research in terms of meaning and perspectives.
- Place emphasis on the process.
- Use theme analysis.

Looking at empathy as a cognitive process could be carried out using manufactured tests to decide whether a pupil or teacher is empathising, but the ethnographic approach I have chosen is characterised by a concern to chart the realities of day to day school life. Departments within schools will have a public face. Qualitative research requires an openness of mind and a need to suspend judgement. What happens in the classroom can be observed, but its usefulness has to be decided upon later. More importantly, theme analysis does allow the researcher to develop themes as they emerge.

The selection of cases will be by the use of case study technique involving the investigation of a relatively small number of cases. Case study research has been used successfully to explore process within the classroom, and it has provided a way of gaining insight into practice and has been useful for policy formulation. It provides a method of exploring in depth a cross section of events. A case study approach offers the opportunity to focus on the individuality of participants and their context, and to examine the process of learning within that context. It offers an opportunity to gain in depth understanding of the whole. By using a case study approach, it was hoped to accommodate a variety of evidence within the framework and allow considerable flexibility in terms of change of direction or growth of the research. A case study approach also recognises that teaching and learning are complex social situations and processes, and it is important to explore them as they occur, in context.

The specific research methods used were:

- Classroom observations of pupils and teachers. These were documented via note taking, case studies, tape recordings and verbatim descriptions of events.
- Largely informal interviews with teachers observed.
- Informal interviews with some of the pupils observed immediately following the lesson observed.
- The collection of written (essay type) responses from one of the lessons observed.
- An examination of examples of empathic type questions obtained from teachers.

The selection of schools was to some extent dictated by access. Schools were approached on the basis of existing knowledge and familiarity. It was hoped that this would minimise reactivity and allow teachers to respond more openly to questions, as well as enabling pupils to feel more comfortable. The choice of schools was limited because it was desirable that they be similar in nature. Access was obtained through the Deputy Headteacher in each case and a clear account of the research interest was given. Both Deputy Heads asked to see the written proposal before agreeing to involvement. Heads of English too, were clear about the purpose of the research.

The selection of a semi structured approach to interviews meant that teachers could explore the subject of empathy. The purpose of the interviews was to examine teacher perception of empathy and ascertain what they understood by the term empathy. Thirty minutes was allowed for each interview.

The observations were set up to look at the process of empathy. To see how it was introduced, used and developed. Observation was non-participant with notes being taken during the process. The Head of English in each case arranged times and lessons, and had been asked to arrange for a group of children to be available for discussion for ten minutes following each observation. The Head of English selected the groups for interview.

- Three teachers were interviewed (thirty minutes each).

- Two classes were observed (one hour – one hour ten minutes in duration).
- Groups of children were of four (i.e. two groups of four children).

The validity of the initial research rests upon three main features, unobtrusive measures, respondent validation and triangulation. Being a non-participant observer certainly meant that I was less obvious in the classroom, and able to study the incidents in the classroom in a more natural way. Reactivity in theory should be minimised. Respondent validation can be achieved by showing the research to some of the respondents (in this cast the Heads of English) and use of observations and interviews was an attempt at simple triangulation.

### *The Interviews*

Three Interviews were arranged, through Heads of Departments. They were conducted out of school during the lunch hour. All teachers interviewed were experienced English teachers with degrees in English Literature. Interviews were recorded, with permission of the interviewee via a small portable tape recorder. Recordings were transcribed. A semi-structured interview technique was used, using a schedule as an aide, memoir.

The purpose of the interview was to collect data for descriptive analysis, and specifically to begin to address some of the research questions, (What do teachers understand by the term empathy? What are teachers' expectations and aims in exploring literature through empathy?). I hoped to identify common understanding of empathy across schools and teachers.

In order to facilitate these objectives and provide a framework for the interviews the idea of empathy as a positive approach to literature was introduced, and teachers were first asked to consider it as a positive tool in the classroom. Information was sought as to when teachers would use an empathic style of teaching. The interviewee was not restricted to Key Stage Three. The interviewees were coded:

Mrs. S. – Had worked in school A for nine years

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Ms B. – had working in school B for three years

Mr. R. – Had worked in school A for four years

Mr. B. – Unqualified assistant in school B since Christmas 1997\*

- It should be noted that a fourth subject, Mr. B appeared unexpectedly towards the end of the first cycle of classroom work. He was in fact an unqualified assistant who had been attached to School B from Christmas 1997 in order to help to set up a Performing Arts Centre using lottery funding.

### *The Observations*

Classroom observations of pupils and staff were undertaken during the course of a normal time tabled lesson. Teachers observed had previously been part of the interview process, but Mr. B had not. Data for descriptive analysis was collected via note taking, tape recordings and verbatim descriptions of events. Informal interviews with some of the pupils observed were undertaken, and written responses were collected from one of the lessons observed.

The purpose of the observations was to collect data for descriptive analysis, specifically it was felt that the observations would be helpful in addressing the implied questions (What is the pupil's experience of empathy? and how are any outcomes assessed?). A further purpose of the interviews was to provide an opportunity to observe teachers use of empathy in the classroom and to match this to the working definitions offered in the interviews.

### *The Schools*

Two schools from County Durham were selected for this research. County Durham was chosen because a working relationship with the LEA was firmly established in terms of my own professional involvement. The schools were selected on the basis of access and both were schools in which I was known through other professional commitments. They were selected on:

- Access.
- Willingness to partake in the research.
- Professional association with the schools (which might help to minimise reactivity among pupils and teachers).
- The similarity of the schools.

Both schools are in areas of County Durham away from major industrial centres, though not strictly speaking rural. Both schools have in the region of 800 pupils. Both are 11 – 16 mixed comprehensive schools with a similar management structure, (Head Teacher, two deputies leading down to dissimilar structures).

In spite of similarities, significant differences were apparent, and it will be helpful to differentiate between the two schools, using simple terminology – School A and School B.

#### School A:

While this school had over 800 pupils at the time of the study, it was suffering from an alarming and rapid decline in numbers, as parents continued to opt for other schools in the region. The school had had a stable staff, but under a new Headteacher, and newly appointed Deputy Head, some of the older members of staff had been put under pressure to take early retirement. At the time of my entry to the school, the relatively new, female Head had been offered and accepted a new post of Head of an all girls Roman Catholic school in Newcastle upon Tyne. The newly appointed Deputy Head had been appointed as acting Head. Ofsted were due to reinspect the school in May, and optimism about the inspection was not high at this time. The school was at the time achieving well below national average in terms of GCSE achievement, across all subjects. The school was situated in an ex category D village, and had extremely high levels of children receiving free school lunch. It also had, at the time of the study, an open admittance policy and had received substantial sums of money to adapt the fabric of the building to accommodate physically disadvantaged children.

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## School B

While on the surface, School B had a similar catchment area to that of School A, being placed in an ex category D village, it was a school which was in demand in the local community. Having been perceived to have “done badly” in an early OFSTED inspection, it had more recently been highlighted as a school making substantial strides forward in terms of Key Stage Three and Four achievement. At the time of this study it was reaching the national average in terms of achievement at GCSE, across all subjects and it was involved in LEA studies on boys’ underachievement at Key Stage Three and Four. English results were above the national average. The management team had been in place for some time (since the original OFSTED inspection) and the staff was relatively young and stable, though the management team was imbalanced in terms of gender. All senior management team members were male with very few female Heads of Departments. The Headteacher in School B was very interested in the research proposal, and seemed to see it as potentially valuable for staff development within the school.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Early Work Findings**

Findings were drawn from the interviews and the observations. Data collected was categorised using categories suggested by the literature review, as well as categories suggested by emerging themes.

The Lessons:

Two English lessons were observed. School B had longer periods than School A so the length of observation was entirely dependent on the school. School A offered a fifty minute observation, with ten minutes allowed for speaking to the children afterwards, while School B offered a full sixty minute observation, with ten minutes set aside to explore issues with the children.

Entry to the classrooms was through the Heads of Departments, and each of the teachers observed had been involved in the initial interviews, and therefore knew about the research being undertaken.

The increasing focus of the observations became:

- How is empathy put to use in the classroom?
- How do teachers interpret empathy – does the action match the rhetoric?
- What is the pupil experience of empathic teaching?
- How is the result of empathic teaching assessed?

The literature on empathy had indicated that an important focus should be the empathic response of both pupil and teacher to each other and the use of role-play within the

classroom. This made data selection easier and helped to focus observation on empathic responses.

### *Cognitive or Conceptual Empathy Identified*

The teachers involved in this initial study quite clearly saw empathy in terms of cognitive response, and as such there is some evidence of common understanding of empathy in the classroom. All three teachers interviewed talked about “depth” of understanding, or “real understanding”. Mr. R. referred to “levels” or “tiers” of understanding. There was much recognition of empathy in the sense of “seeing something from someone else’s point of view”. Aspy’s definition of empathy (1975) and his attempt to relate this to common phrases such as “I am with you”, “I hear you” are clearly recognisable here. These teachers tended to describe empathy in terms of the text used, and to give examples using particular texts, e.g. Ms B. “Like in *To Kill a Mockingbird* – Scout is always being told to stand in someone else’s skin – now that’s empathy”.

However, there seemed to be an underlying assumption that empathy would produce improved learning and understanding: Mrs. S. “It adds depth – real understanding – like in *Romeo and Juliet* – it should help them to see the guilt of the nurse – to follow and understand her responsibility”. There also seemed to be an assumption that the pupils engaged cognitively with the text **because** of the nature of the text. The teachers interviewed did not seem to question whether or not their presentation was truly empathic. They generally did not break empathy down into components or strands. There seemed to be an assumption that as they were producing written work, they were engaging empathetically, and cognitively with the text. In fact, some of the questions used in empathic lessons, seemed to encourage an **emotional** response to the text. For example, the poem *Mid Term Break*, (see appendix 1) provoked an emotional response from the children interviewed, but in relation to the feelings of the mother. As one of the girls put it: “That must have been awful for her – it’s not so bad – to lose a brother – but how could she stand it?”

The girl (pupil) here seemed less interested in the feelings of the boy. This may imply that the gender implications, which were identified by Ms B., are evident, and it may be difficult for the girls to empathise with the boy in the poem. Their comments though would indicate that they are projecting or generalising rather than empathising. They may be using their own knowledge about “loss” and assuming that the mother (who actually does not come into the poem at all) would feel the same way.

When asked about assessment strategies for measuring the success of empathic questions, the teachers were less clear. “I **know** that empathy helps them to see – it’s better than a written response – and it does show when they come to write ideas up. I think it’s best – most useful for developing oracy”. This teacher, Ms B. was unusual in that she said that she would not necessarily follow empathic work up with a written response. Generally these teachers saw empathy as a way to introduce a new topic or an extension of a theme they were studying. This was apparent in Mrs. S.’s stated intention to use the text of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and examine the brother – sister relationship through a poem about sibling death. It seemed to be assumed that the pupils would benefit from this broader view and that their understanding of the relationship between the children in *To Kill a Mockingbird* would be enriched. “The relationship between Scout and her brother is very important, the two children learn to accommodate each other and they grow together” - (Mrs. S.). It was assumed that the pupils would make the connection between the two texts themselves, as in spite of a very brief introduction in the observed lesson, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was not referred to in the teaching of *Mid Term Break*.

The perceived importance of the cognitive strand in empathy is emphasised by the reliance of these teachers on the written response to empathic teaching. Even when a lesson did not have an immediate written task set, the assumption was made that “pupils will demonstrate a higher level of understanding when they come to do written work in the future”. – Ms B. All teachers interviewed used the expression “get pupils to see it (or feel it)” which would indicate that the empathic process is recognised at some level as

affective, even though the teachers interviewed did not seem to break empathy into different compartments.

Empathy was seen as very much a **reinforcement** of knowledge (see also Heathcote 1984). For example, the drama session observed on *Romeo and Juliet* in which a Year Eight class were divided into Capulets and Montagues in order to explore the reasons for the conflict between the families, had been arranged in response to the pupils inability to understand the conflict between the two families within the play. It was anticipated that the session would “enable them to see – to feel – the conflict in greater depth”, rather than to add new knowledge. Similarly, the poem, *Mid Term Break* was introduced to extend the pupils’ understanding of the sibling relationship in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

An empathic approach seems to often offer an introduction to a piece of literature, and a way to link one text with another. All three teachers claimed to use empathic responses to provoke discussion in class, but again all three teachers said that such responses would be followed up with a written response (which may or may not be empathic). For example, one teacher, Ms B., would use *Timothy Winters* (see appendix 1) to give “insight into the boy, and what made Timothy the way he is”, and the kind of written response she would elicit from this would be a personal, step by step account of his/her own school experience which would not necessarily be in the first person.

Empathy might also provide a link into more difficult texts – “Doing *Timothy Winters* would lead to something like *Kes*, I mean, *A Kestrel for A Knave*, and looking at little Billy (Casper)” – Mr. R. The use of empathy in the teaching of poetry in this way seemed to be common across these teachers, though in classroom observation there was a doubt as to whether the children were in fact engaging in empathy. In School A, the teacher (Mrs. S.) was trying to introduce a simple poem for analysis, and had decided to use an empathic approach, linking the poem to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which the class of year ten children had been studying. While the teacher spent some ten minutes talking about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the focus of her talk was on specific chapters of the text, rather than on the sibling relationship, with the result that the poem was presented in an

isolated way. The teacher asked the children to work in pairs and present their own interpretation of the poem *Mid Term Break*, which is about the death of the writer's small brother. While the pupils clearly engaged with the task, and generally liked the lesson: "English is good – bit more relaxed than other (lessons)", there was little evidence of empathic engagement with the text in any part of the lesson. The context of the lesson (i.e. pair work) and the instructions given to the pupils would seem to facilitate discussion rather than empathy. Certainly, there was no recognisable role-play, and the teacher did not remind the pupils that they were supposed to be in role, simply accepting the discussions as they occurred. The pupils were engaging with the text, though their responses were not empathic, using our own definition of the word. The pupils were sympathetic to the boy in the poem (Wispe, 1968) but they were not empathising. None of the pupils involved in the group interviews seemed to recognise their own presentation as role-play. During the interview, Mrs. S. had used empathy as synonymous with sympathy, and the classroom observation in School A would suggest that Mrs. S. is using a different definition of empathy to that which we have adopted. It seems likely that she is understanding empathy as a state of being, rather than a process, (Rogers, 1975).

It is interesting to note that the pupils felt that the written response was the most important part of the lesson, even though this was set outside of the lesson as homework. One girl commented, "Miss would probably give them a mark for that (the homework) and it might count towards the exam". Once again, cognitive engagement seemed to be assumed because there was a written response.

### ***Cognition and Written Work***

Pupils were required to present a written response to the poem *Mid Term Break*. The set task was to:

*Imagine you are the boy in the poem. Explain your account of the day and describe your feelings about what happened.*

The choice of material is interesting of course, because the experience of a brother dying is likely to be well outside of the experience of the children. The fact that the boy has been recalled from boarding school is a further distancing feature, since these pupils were unlikely to have experienced boarding school. It is possible that the teacher was deliberately distancing the pupils (Gladstein 1983), to protect them from over identification, but it is interesting to note that out of twenty two children in the class, the teacher had only received sixteen written responses three weeks after the lesson. Of the sixteen pieces received, four of them (25%) were not written in the first person, and simply described the boy's experience in the poem. For example, the introductory sentence of one of the four read, "The boy describes how he sat in the sick bay all morning until some neighbours came and took him home". His observation is accurate, but not empathic. Of the four written in the third person, boys submitted three of them. The twelve pieces, which were written in the first person, were marked by the class teacher and deemed to belong to a low-level response, with only one girl being awarded a "B" grade. Three of the pieces which had been written in the third person were awarded a "B" grade, which would seem to indicate that there is a contradiction between the teachers stated expectations and her perceptions of "good work". Mrs. S. justified this in terms of the detail presented: "These ones go into much more detail – this one - 'all of a sudden he was grown up' - now that's perceptive". In terms of assessment then, level of perception was valued more than level of empathy, though this was not indicated to the pupils. It seemed to be assumed that most of them would write a better response by writing in the first person.

Of those in the first person, the teacher believed that the children "had just said what happened – haven't thought about the boys feelings or tried to think what it would be like if it happened to them". It is interesting to note that the study of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which had been the starting point of the lesson did not resurface. Children seemed to fail to make the connection between the two texts, and more significantly they failed to predict how they would react in similar situations (Weinstein 1969) even though they spent some time working out a presentation of the poem.

The assumption that the children would engage **cognitively** and empathically with the text is clearly not borne out by the responses, either written or oral. It seems likely that what the children were being encouraged in was a process of generalisation (Shantz 1975), in which each child can identify how they have felt in the past, and then make the assumption that all children, or at least similar children would feel the same way. A quote from my field notes indicates my initial reaction: “Little evidence of cognitive engagement – with text or anything else! Affective domain only?” It is interesting to note that the teacher did not think that the lesson was unsuccessful, preferring to see it in terms of pupil enjoyment. “Well, they certainly liked it.....and they nearly all handed the written work in on time – that’s good in itself in this school!” from Mrs. S. The teacher involved here said that she would use the text again. Cognitive engagement seemed to be measured by the pupil behaviour, rather than by assessed outcome, which was perceived as being poor. The emphasis placed by Mrs. S. on enjoyment should not be too lightly dismissed, since the National Curriculum Document (1995) talked of “activities that emphasise the interest and pleasure of reading them, rather than necessitating a detailed line by line study.” However, it did not seem that the children were being challenged to create their own knowledge during this process. Even in the general terms of convenient Constructivist thinking the pupils were not seen to engage in the task through the teacher as facilitator, though it could be argued that the children worked collaboratively at times during the lesson.

### ***Role Taking***

Role taking has been identified as a high order cognitive skill, and it is thought to be the centre of empathy as identified in Chapter Two.

All three teachers interviewed identified role taking as an important part of using empathy in the classroom to teach English Literature. Two of the three said that they would always use drama “at some level”. However, observations show that there is variation in what these teachers would expect when they put children into role. Mrs. S. believed that she always used role-play when trying to teach in an empathic way.



However, reference to my notes indicated that there was no evidence of role taking in her lesson, with children simply discussing the problems set. Mrs. S. did try to move around each group as they worked, but significantly, she did not try to encourage the pupils to move back into role. By contrast, Ms B. and Mr. B. worked very hard to keep the pupils in role. It was Ms B. for example, working in role, who brought the conversation around to what they should do about Juliet being in love with a Montague: “Well this could just be a rumour, but I hear that our cousin, Juliet, is going out with one of them”. Ms B. seemed to be acting as the facilitator while remaining in role herself, (see appendix 2).

During the lesson with Ms B. and Mr. B., pupils were seen to move in and out of role very easily, i.e. “Miss, are we in modern dress?” Whether this is significant or not can be examined further during later stages of this research, but it may also be useful in helping pupils to distance themselves from characters, and so to prevent over identification. The fact that the children were brought out of role through a deliberate process of closure (the hauling in of local football club colours, see appendix 2) in order to reflect on their feelings experienced in role, would suggest distancing. A significant part of the lesson took place out of role, and focused on specific learning objectives. Ms B. was very clear in her belief that role-play was not just to “fill time in” or to make the subject more “enjoyable for the pupils”. “The whole group should be brought to a greater understanding, not just about *Romeo and Juliet*, but about all conflicts everywhere, anytime”. This perception clearly relates back to Heathcote’s belief (1984) that a teacher who is a facilitator should bring pupils to use their own experience in order to make sense of a text and to create their own knowledge. There would seem to be an underlying belief in the idea of universal truth.

This lesson contrasted sharply with that observed where Mrs. S. did not enter into a role herself, and took up the position of an observer. Mr. B. and Ms B. moved the drama on through their own role-play as members of the two conflicting groups. The children worked collaboratively while the teachers developed the experience as facilitators, largely remaining in role themselves. Constructivist thinking was clearly evident in this session,

and the children were encouraged to reflect on their experiences out of role, and so take some control of their own cognition (Watts and Bentley, 1991).

### *Affective Empathy*

The teachers interviewed did not identify an affective strand to empathy, though their frequent reference to pupil “understanding” or feeling would seem to imply that this was recognised on one level. Ms B. and Mr B. led their pupils through a number of processes, and it is likely that their emphasis on how it felt to be a “group” member in a conflict situation included an affective empathic response. One of the boys: “They hate us, like – it’s real when you are there”. In role, one of the boys said; “They hate us, you know, we don’t do anything, they pick on us”. This might be a simple transferring of their own feelings and attributing them to others, facilitated in this case by the use of a recognisable element in that the Montagues and Capulets were represented by local and opposing football clubs. Such projection is affective and not cognitive (Chandler 1974). Out of role, the pupils were asked to engage cognitively with the text of *Romeo and Juliet*. In this way, the affective response can be seen to be an important part of the process of empathy.

Lack of cognitive engagement with the text can also be related to the less positive aspects of empathic teaching in the classroom as identified by Ms B. during the interview. She expressed doubts about empathy in terms of the lack of practitioner commitment. “Talk about the blind leading the blind – describe what it’s like to be the albatross!!!!!!” This was related by Ms B. to an unacceptable low level of response: “Like Eva Smith (from *An Inspector Calls*) – all of those inane diaries – what are the children learning from that? They are creating diaries which reflect their own lives, and they have no understanding of Eva Smith’s”. Such a low level of response could be the result of the pupils failing to engage cognitively with the text, the pupil response given being a result of emotional contagion. It is interesting to note that Hogan (1975) found that literary achievement in a group of creative writer’s was impeded rather than enhanced by empathy. This would seem to be supported by the view, expressed by Ms B. that empathy “might discourage

the art of writing – which becomes colloquial, and too close to an oral response”. Ms B. believed that this might disadvantage some children when it came to written assessment: “This is a huge danger for our kids with their limited experience, because they are not able to differentiate between higher and lower writing skills.” There was some recognition that empathic approaches are difficult to sustain, and work produced might be “less than meaningful”.

In School A the pupils engaged in the work on *Mid Term Break* appeared to be involved in emotional contagion (Shantz 1975). They were seen to observe another person’s actual condition and to respond emotionally. One of the girls observed commented: “It’s sad – he’s sad – he must of felt bad like, not to say good bye or anything – really sad – most for the mother”. The children are responding to the boy, even sympathising with him (Wispe 1968), but they are not empathising. The lack of cognitive engagement may relate to the lack of role-play in this particular lesson in School A, and the apparent failure to recognise that empathy is a process rather than a state. Role-play requires cognitive response of the highest order, and where the role-play was lacking the process of empathy was not developed. While the affective response can be important it needs to be developed beyond the initial response.

### ***Generalisation***

Generalisation, according to Shantz (1975) is a process in which the child can identify how they have felt in the past, and assume that another (similar) child would feel the same. This is best thought of as another component of the affective strand of empathy. Generalisation is important in terms of the types of text or tasks chosen for teachers to present empathically. To what extent are the tasks sets encouraging pupils to generalise, drawing upon their own real or imagined past emotions? This is important as it is likely to relate to the teachers understanding of empathy in the classroom. Many of the texts used were used by more than one of the teachers interviewed:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* (three teachers)
- *Of Mice and Men* (two teachers)

- *Romeo and Juliet* (three teachers)
- *Timothy Winters* (two teachers)
- *A Inspector Calls* (two teachers)
- *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* (two teachers)
- *1984* (two teachers)

It is interesting to note that empathy seemed to be used most in cases of human anguish, and the lack of comic material in empathic response was very noticeable. It is also interesting that teachers use essay type questions, which might be thought to encourage generalisation rather than empathy. For example, one question asked pupils to "*Imagine you are Juliet awakening in the tomb. Write a final letter to your parents explaining how you came to be in this situation*". Although the teacher who set this piece of work (Mrs. S.) offered it as an example of empathic response, the question seems to encourage the pupils to generalise in a broad sense, i.e. to imagine what it would have felt like to wake in a tomb, and then assume that anyone would feel the same way. In order for the pupil to be able to differentiate cognitively between their own and the other's point of view, the pupil must be able to assume the role of Juliet accurately, then be able to correctly predict what might have happened. The question would seem to encourage a response based on matching of emotional responses, and it is likely that this was based upon projection or generalisation. Hogan's belief (1975) that pupils were unlikely to be able to empathise with situations outside of their experience is important here. The pupil may well draw upon situations in which they have been alone, or afraid, but they have no direct experience to compare with Juliet's. An interesting area for further exploration would be whether or not the pupil's written response was essentially different from that which would be given had the question simply been stated as: "*Describe how Juliet came to be in the tomb*". Both questions would seem to be encouraging a general descriptive response, rather than an analysis of events. We might further question whether asking pupils to imagine they are Juliet and write a letter will prevent the pupils from empathising with Juliet the character. The focus on such a written response, in such

unlikely circumstances makes generalisation or projection much more likely than empathy.

Other questions from the same source would suggest that little consideration has been taken of the actual characters. For example, another *Romeo and Juliet* question from the same source asked pupils to “*Imagine you are the Nurse, write a letter describing your role in the deaths of the young lovers.*” (The letter was to be addressed to the Prince). The pupils are being asked to do something which is out of character for the nurse who would have been unlikely to have the skills in order to write such a letter, and we have to ask whether or not such misunderstandings of the nurse can help the pupils to a clearer understanding of the text of the play. If Juliet’s frame of mind upon awakening is to be understood by the pupils, then the writing of the letter is likely to negate such a feeling, since it would seem to be an impossible task.

Even when working within the context of a discussion lesson, Mrs. S. asked the children to work in pairs and to discuss, in role as siblings, common disputes. Observations here indicated that the pupils did not readily go into role, most of them discussing the tasks in the third person e.g. girl 2: “Well, Sarah (older sister) she always fights with me mam”, or girl 1: “I’m not allowed to say nothing against me brother –he’s always right.” The girls remained on task but in a very distanced way. They were clearly doing just enough to satisfy the teacher: girl 1: “What else then? We haven’t done enough”.

### **Identification**

Rogers (1975) clearly distinguished between empathy and identification. If a subject identified too closely with the object, then they would be unable to move freely between the two worlds or states, and this could affect the positive outcome. Ms B. and Mr. B. clearly indicated an awareness of the dangers of over identification. “There is the danger that children might associate rather than empathise – you have to be careful – there’s always a little Billy (Casper) in the class”. Identification could become a serious problem, especially if we look again at the kind of texts or situations we are asking

children to empathise with. We must ask ourselves whether or not it is desirable to expect children to empathise with human anguish, unless we are confident that we can prevent over identification. One teacher was particularly concerned about the use of a “suicide note” from Juliet. The class had been asked by another teacher, according to Ms B. to write a suicide note from Juliet. Ms B. was concerned about the desirability of asking teenagers to write in this style, believing that “girls in particular are vulnerable – they can talk themselves into all kinds of romantic nonsense”.

Ms B. further made the point that to ask pupils to respond in this way showed a lack of understanding of the text: “So your’re asking them to empathise – to become someone who you can’t understand yourself – why would Juliet write a suicide note?” It does seem reasonable to question whether such rewriting of the text leads to greater cognitive engagement with or understanding of the character.

The danger of over identification was also apparent in School B, where Mr. B. and Ms B. used the idea of supporting different local football clubs to help them to overtly identify and then empathise with the Montagues and Capulets. The pupils needed very firm handling, and for part of the lesson at least, focused only on the football clubs: “They hate us – ‘cos we support Newcastle and they think they are as good as us – when they’re not” (Appendix 2).

Both adults present had to work hard at keeping the pupils on task, but they did clearly define when children were in role or not by the hoisting of football club colours. Moving in and out of role seemed to be something the children were used to. In this process, the pupils were first led to identify with the Capulets and Montagues, and to respond on an emotional level: “Right, you lot here. You guys are Capulets.....and....” he removed a black and white shirt from a carrier bag and threw it at the group, “and you support Newcastle United....come on then!” The pupils were then encouraged to examine their feelings out of role. They were asked to focus on why a leader should emerge, and to think about why the families might have hated each other. Their responses were wide and varied. The pupils in this case were clearly engaged with the task, and there was little

evidence of lack of participation. The technique used here could be likened to Heathcotes's in that the children were clearly in role for much of the lesson, but the final responses were written up on a flip chart out of role. The children were being led through a process of identification, to empathy and then out of role they were encouraged to look back at how they had felt while in role. They were given the opportunity to reflect on their experience and to move outside of the immediate experience, thereby taking some control of their own cognition.

### *Teachers as an Empathic Audience*

The observations and interviews allowed me to explore the issues of empathic modelling and empathic listening raised in the literature review. If we recognise empathy as an important learning tool, how important is it that teachers present an empathic role model, listen in an empathic way and respond to the children in an empathic way? Further, if we accept empathy as a valuable tool in teaching, can teachers be taught to increase their ability to empathise? Heathcote's rigorous training programme for teachers used throughout the seventies at The University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, was built on the premise that trainers could be taught to use empathy as a learning tool, and to empathise with the children in their classrooms. The context of the early fieldwork did not allow me to investigate whether teachers were phenotypically or genotypically empathic, but using Cooper's identification of empathic traits (1997 a, b,), it was possible to observe the responses between pupil and teacher.

One of the teachers interviewed, Mr. R, claimed to use empathy in his teaching every day, though on closer examination his responses indicated that he was referring to general empathic responses to the children: "I try to feel what it is like to have no breakfast before coming to school, I try to listen to them, and I talk to them as much as I can – yes I think I do empathise with them – I try to."

The three teachers interviewed, and the two lessons observed, would indicate that all teachers achieved what Hogan (1975) described as an empathic audience. All of the

teachers observed were committed to using child centred teaching methods. In observations they had all responded empathetically to the pupils throughout the sessions, using Cooper's indications as derived from her own observations. They looked relaxed, smiled a lot, joked with the children, listened to what they were saying and responded when they could, and they used their names a lot. All of the teachers observed moved freely about the classroom contributing to group work and seemed relaxed with their pupils.

Further evidence that the teachers observed provided an empathic audience could be drawn from the pupil's responses to the lessons. The teachers observed seemed to be popular, though in part this may relate to a perceived lack of work carried out in English lessons: "English is good anyway.....next week we are going to watch a video", or following Mrs. S.'s lesson: "Yeah – it's good, she does a lot of the talking....you can talk to your friends." Since none of the teachers involved in this early work had undergone "training" in empathic responses or teaching, it would seem reasonable to assume that these teachers were displaying trait empathy. However, if Hogan (1975) is correct and what is important is that the teacher behaves as though they are empathising, it could be that these teachers are consciously developing what they perceive to be good practice.

### ***Conclusion and Reflection***

In this early fieldwork the focus was on the understanding of teachers when they use the term empathy. There does seem to be some common understanding of empathy in general terms. Teachers interviewed saw empathy as a means to encourage pupils to see something from a different point of view, and the assumption was made that this is a positive and desirable outcome. The research indicated that there are significant variations in what teachers define as empathic, and that the pupil experience of empathy in the classroom will differ according to the teacher perceptions. There were seen to be considerable differences in the teachers' perceived presentation of empathic tasks, and those observed, particularly in the case of what constitutes role-play, a significant factor in the process of empathy. Where the teacher used a less formal approach, whether or



not it is genuinely empathic, to present tasks, the pupil seems to find it a pleasurable activity in the context of school. However, it would seem from the pupil responses that such lessons are not always valued and may be perceived by pupils as an “easy option”, as described by Ms B. Where empathy was valued primarily as a vehicle for written response, the quality of the written response was often of a low order, even when the pupils had identified the written task as the important one. Although more work needs to be done before we are able to generalise, it does seem that removing empathy from a direct written task, and allowing pupils to engage the affective domain, as well as the cognitive domain, has more positive outcomes in that children are able to predict what is likely to happen in certain circumstances through discussion. Using Gladstein’s simple definition:

“Cognitive empathy refers to intellectually taking the role or perspective of another person.....affective empathy refers to responses with the same emotion to another”(1983 p.468), we can identify the affective and the cognitive strands of empathy, and it seems that where the affective strand only is engaged the response is likely to be of a low order. In order to develop the process of empathy, role taking has to be introduced and reinforced, and seemed to be more easily developed by the teacher acting as a facilitator. The teachers interviewed did not always see empathy as a process, or a number of processes.

The early work confirmed the complexity of empathy, and established it as a process rather than as a state of being. At its highest level in the classroom it can be seen as an attempt to perceive the worlds as others might (Gladstein, 1983). Children are asked to consider the consequences of their feelings and actions, rather than to simply reflect upon them or respond to them. Children are encouraged to take some responsibility for their own learning, and they are encouraged to be proactive in it. At a lower level, there is confusion about what constitutes empathy, and how to organise and utilise role-play .

## **Chapter Five**

### **Developing the Research Methodology**

The limited nature of the initial study and its focus on non-participant observation, led to some illumination in terms of the teachers understanding of empathy. In developing this work, I was particularly interested in empathy and its effect on the construction of knowledge. In order to move towards this narrower focus the research framework was restructured to allow for the use of one school over a much longer period of time. If we accept empathy as the complex process suggested by Rogers (1975) and Gladstein (1983) - and the early work would seem to support this complexity, it would seem more pertinent to focus on an in depth study of a single department, rather than continuing with observations across two schools.

At this stage of the research, action research was seen to have some advantages over non-participant observation:

- The researcher would have more control over empathic presentation.
- Working in the school as a researcher would allow the researcher to continue non-participant observation during pre arranged sessions.
- Working as part of an English Department gives the researcher access to considerable teaching resources that may shed more light on how empathy is used.
- Utilising action research offers a way of looking at classrooms, which is systematic but flexible, and able to accommodate the diverse and unpredictable elements in the English classroom.

If the focus of the later fieldwork was to be the experience of the pupil in the classroom, and to what extent empathy helps children to construct knowledge, using action research methods instead of other qualitative research methods adopted for the initial study, it was

important to develop an understanding of, and a working definition of this method of research. It is quite evident that there is a lot of debate about what makes action research different from other research methods, and it is difficult to reduce it to a list of set criteria.

### ***Focus on Action Research***

Perhaps the biggest influence on what we might term the development of action research in the UK can be attributed to Lawrence Stenhouse, (McNiff, 1988). Stenhouse first gave prominence to the idea of the teacher as researcher, and he emphasised the need for discussion, and close interpersonal relationships between teachers and pupils. His Humanities Curriculum Project (1967 – 1972) tried to establish a “liberating atmosphere” for pupils in the classroom. He tried to move teachers away from rigid and authoritarian roles. Teachers should regard themselves as researchers, able to judge and evaluate their own practice, and this would lead to the improvement of education.

He identified the characteristics of a professional teacher:

- Commitment to systematic questioning of one’s own teaching as a basis for development.
- The commitment and the skills to study one’s own teaching.
- The concern to question and to test theory in practice by the use of those skills.

(Stenhouse in McNiff, 1988 p.143)

It should be noted that the methods of evaluation were in an interpretative mode with an external researcher monitoring the class progress at this stage. It was only later that attention was given to the interpretation by teachers of their own practice. There is a wealth of literature developing this idea. Carr and Kemmis, (1986) for example, saw action research as a self-reflective spiral of “planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning as the basis for a problem solving manoeuvre”, (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 p.237).

Through the literature of action research, we can identify key characteristics of this approach, and we can demonstrate its relevance in the study of empathy at Key Stage Three. As a basis for further research, it was recognised that the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice, rather than to produce knowledge, (Elliott 1991). Education is not manifested in the outcomes of a practice, but evident in the qualities of the practices themselves. If teaching is to influence the development of intellectual powers in a curriculum content, it must advocate openness to questions, ideas and ways of thinking. It must foster an interest in the subject taught or the subject matter:

What makes teaching an educational practice isn't simply the quality of its educational outcomes, but the manifestation within the practice itself of certain qualities that constitute it as an educational process capable of fostering educational outcomes in terms of student learning.

(Elliott 1991 p.50)

Improving practice involves process and product. Elliott argues that the quality of learning outcomes is only an indirect indicator of the quality of the teaching process. He points out that poor quality outcomes are due to many factors and it isn't viable to presume a direct casual relationship. It is this reflection about the relationship of processes and products which is a central characteristic of reflective practice (Schon 1987). The reflective practitioner's understanding of the values he or she tries to realise in practice are forever being transformed in the process of reflection. For the purposes of my research into empathy at Key Stage Three, action research is located in this reflective practice which aims to improve "the realisation of process values." (Elliott p.50). Action research should improve practice by developing capacity for discrimination and judgement. According to Elliott, within this form of enquiry, the theoretical abstraction is subordinate to the development of wisdom grounded in reflective experience.

Elliott further identifies the need on the part of the practitioner to initiate change and to innovate it as a precondition of action research. At its best, action research unifies teaching, curriculum development, evaluation, research and professional development. It becomes impossible to separate the research process from the evaluation of the teaching, and evaluation is a key component of such research. The study of curriculum development should not be from detached researchers, but from practitioners who have a commitment to effect worthwhile change.

Cohen and Manion too, (1980) tried to define action research and identify key characteristics, many of which can be identified in my own approach:

Action Research is a small-scale intervention in the function of the real work and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention.

(Cohen and Manion 1980 p.217)

Crucially, for this research, Cohen and Manion assert that action research is not only situational (concerned with a specific context and finding a solution in the same context), it is at its best when **collaborative**. Practitioners work together on a project with all members being **participatory**. Team members take part directly in implementing the research. It should also be self-evaluative, and modifications are continuously evaluated within the spiral.

Cohen and Manion (1980) are careful to distinguish between **action research** and **applied research**, though they recognised that they have similarities. However, applied research is concerned with testing theories, and is quite rigorous in its application. Action research has as its focus a specific problem in a specific setting, and the emphasis is not on obtaining generalizable scientific knowledge.

Cohen and Manion also identified what it is that makes action research particularly suitable in the context of school and the improvement of educational practice. They point

out that classrooms are particularly **flexible and adaptable**, lending themselves to on the spot experimentation or innovation. It relies on **observation** and **behavioural** data and is **empirical** in nature. A teacher working in a class has access to vast amounts of such data. Information can be collected, shared, discussed, recorded and evaluated.

Action research is applicable to a wide range of educational contexts. Cohen and Manion (1980), believed that it is an appropriate and fitting approach where:

Specific knowledge is required for a specific problem in a specific situation, or when a new approach is to be grafted on to an existing system.

(Cohen and Manion 1980 p.226)

Cohen and Manion identified teaching methods, learning strategies, evaluative procedures, attitudes and values, personal development of teachers, management and control and administration as being areas where it would be appropriate and fitting to engage in action research. In terms of my own research, there is overlap between teaching methods and learning strategies.

Carr and Kemmis (1986), took the idea of collaboration further. In their work they not only define action research, but also identify three distinct types of such research. They too, subscribe to the view that the end is the improvement of practice. Good educational action research leads to improved self understanding of practitioners involving themselves in the research process:

Action research involves practitioners directly in the reconstruction and transformation of practice through involving them in planning, acting, observing and reflecting on practice, the interpretation of practice, and the situation in which practice occurs.

(Carr and Kemmis 1986 p.237)

They then go on to claim that it is “only practitioners” who can use action research effectively. One way around this for myself was to adopt their ideas on the collaborative nature of action research.

### ***Collaboration in Action Research***

If action research can only be research into practice by practitioners, for practitioners, then clearly it will be necessary to work collaboratively with a full time practitioner, and involve that practitioner in the planning and presentation of lessons, while returning to practice myself. Clearly this will not completely solve the problem of conflicting interests between practitioners and researchers, but I felt that if we could reach a common understanding of the purpose of our research, it should be productive. The main purpose of my research in terms of action research was to improve my own practice, leading to a better learning experience for the pupils. In this case, both the classroom teacher and myself (both practitioners) will be involved in the teaching process in the classroom. It was clearly not my intention to plan the work and hand it over for implementation to another practitioner. Carr and Kemmis (1986) have recognised that while practitioners are needed to carry out action research, it is common and acceptable for outsiders to be involved. They do point out that the relationships between such outsiders and practitioners can have effects on the research undertaken. My interpretation of collaboration was that lessons would be planned together, and taught collaboratively. Since this was to be a long term involvement over a term with a class of pupils and I would be taking responsibility (with one other teacher) for the planning, delivery and assessment of lessons I regarded myself as a practitioner as well as a researcher, and I hoped to avoid the trap of action research becoming a:

...species of field experimentation or applied research carried out by academic or service researchers who co-opt practitioners into gathering data about educational practices for them.

(Carr and Kemmis 1986 p.240)

My aim was to look at the process of my own teaching, with another practitioner. In other words, I was seeking to form a co-operative and productive relationship with one practitioner, in order to plan strategic action, monitor the action and reflect on the process and its consequences. Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggest that this process of consultancy is best described as **practical** action research, since it aims to sharpen the reasoning of an individual practitioner. I see my own action research as being grounded in **collaborative** and **practical** techniques.

When talking about action research it is also important to establish a common understanding of the importance of generalisation as a goal of such research. Some researchers reject generalizability as a goal. Denzin for example believed that:

Every interaction, if thickly described represents a slice from the life work that is the proper subject matter for interpretative inquiry.....every topic.....must be seen as carrying its own logic, sense of order, structure and meaning.

(In Schofield 1993 p.92)

It has been suggested that underlying qualitative approaches of any kind is the assumption that such research is influenced by the researchers individual attributes and perspectives and the goal is not to produce a standard set of results that can be replicated, (Schofield 1993). Clearly, where researchers take many months or years on a case study of a very small number of cases, generalizability isn't likely to be possible, but we do need to develop a concept of generalizability. It may be more useful to talk about fittingness rather than generalizability. This, it could be argued, places the emphasis on analysing the degree to which the situation studied matches other situations is a more realistic and workable way of thinking.

Whitehead, summarised in McNiff (1988), saw the importance of making action research meaningful to individual educators, and he reformulated the action reflection cycle into a



pattern of statements which were found to be particularly useful, and which could be summarised as:

- I experience a problem when some of my values are denied in practice.
- I imagine a solution to the problem.
- I implement the imagined solution.
- I evaluate the outcome of my action.
- I reformulate my problem in the light of my evaluation.

Adapted from Whitehead (McNiff 1988 p.38)

The suggestion that a starting point might be a set of questions was useful. It was likely that questions will develop and change as the research progressed. It was important that the spirals of planning, action, observance, reflecting, replanning were able to consider a number of problems at the same time. Indeed, spirals may develop spin off spirals (McNiff p.44). McNiff suggests that generative action research allows the researcher to address many problems at once. The later stages of this research into empathy was designed to be **collaborative** and **practical** in nature. It was **generative** in that it allowed spin offs to develop and to be included in the findings. It was designed to be **participative** in that all participants would contribute.

This second stage of the classroom research reflects Wadsworth's (1998) view of participatory action research:

- Commences – with stopping. That is we do not begin to inquire until we suspend our current action because of the
- Raising of a question: which then provokes us to go about
- Planning ways to get answers – which will involve identifying and involving questioners, the questioned and an idea of who or for what we desire answers:

- Engaging in fieldwork about new, current or past action in order to get answers and improve our experiential understanding of the problematic situation:
- Generating from the answers an imaginative idea of what to do to change and improve our actions:
- The putting into practice of the new actions (followed by further stopping, reflecting and possible problematisation).

(Wadsworth, 1998 p.3)

The participants in this stage of the research can be identified as the researchers (practitioners), the researched, the researched for (in the sense of the problem). The action research was being driven by the desire to know, in order to bring about desired change in our own practice.

### ***Teacher Involvement***

In order to progress the action research, it was necessary to establish common-working grounds with the teacher involved. Ms B. (based in School B), had expressed interest in further involvement, and as she had expressed commitment to an empathic approach I suggested that we work together. It seemed to me that she had many of the qualities required for effective action research, and she was clear about why she was interested in the research, citing her own personal experience that led to her questioning the use of empathy in the classroom without prior training. I was able to identify the characteristics of the professional teacher in her:

- Commitment to systematic questioning of her own teaching.
- The commitment and the skills to study her own teaching.
- The concern to question and to test theory.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Year Eight in Action**

#### ***Establishing the Action Research***

I have already examined the debate surrounding action research, and identified an action research methodology appropriate as a model for further work. However, it is perhaps worth underlining, some of the main tenets that have influenced the second spiral of fieldwork and reflection.

- Action research is a self-reflective spiral of planning, observing, and reflecting.
- A fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice, rather than to produce knowledge.
- The practitioners are required to initiate change.
- Action research can, and some would say should, be collaborative, with practitioners working together on a project with all members being participatory.
- Action research should be self-evaluative with modifications evaluated within the spiral.

From my own point of view, as I am not a member of the teaching staff in the school I am using for my fieldwork, the opportunity to work collaboratively was important. Action research was particularly suitable as I was interested in applying observation to collect, share, discuss, record and evaluate the data collected. It was my intention that my teaching partner should be involved in the evaluation of data at all stages. My intention was to look at the process of my own teaching in conjunction with another practitioner, and to improve practice. In other words, I sought to form a co-operative and productive relationship with one practitioner, in order to plan strategic action, monitor the action and

reflect on the process and consequences of the action. Carr and Kemmis (1986) have suggested that this process of consultancy is best described as practical action research, since it aims to sharpen the reasoning of an individual practitioner.

As the research progressed, teaching methods became more central to the process of evaluating the use of empathy, though there is still considerable overlap between teaching methods and learning strategies. In other words, when working in the classroom, we were observing what it is that facilitates learning. While we are using a range of teaching strategies and evaluating these, we need also to ask the question, "What are the characteristics of a capable or successful learner?" It is pertinent to the study that many current educators recognise that "successful learners are knowledgeable, self determined, strategic, and empathetic", (Cotton 1997 p.2). Jones (1990) asserted that successful learners need to have:

- Knowledge
- Motivation
- Tools and strategies for acquiring, evaluating and applying the knowledge.
- Insight into the motives, feelings and behaviour of others – empathy.

For successful learning to take place, the ability to communicate with others is essential, and it is important to use teaching strategies which allow the pupils to not only communicate, but to express their understanding of a given situation. I have already identified role-play as central to empathy in the English classroom, (Heathcote 1984). Of further interest in this study of teaching strategies at Key Stage Three, is the work by Underwood and Moor (1982), in which they identified role taking capacity as the basis for the increased levels of empathy and prosocial behaviour which can be observed in older children.

One of the problems with using role-play within the context of our own classroom, is the perception by the senior management of the school that concentration on such role-play is likely to take time away from the development of basic and higher order cognitive skills. This view, at least in part, resulted in the assignment to us of a particular class, often seen

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as troublesome by a number of teachers, and with, it might be argued, lower expectations in academic terms from some members of the teaching staff.

Such attitudes are of course, contradicted by the findings of much research which shows correlation between students' involvement in empathic understanding and their academic performance:

- Bonner and Aspy (1984) identified significant correlation between student scores on measures of empathic understanding and grade point averages.
- Kohn (1991) indicated that schools where students are involved in programmes designed to increase empathy and create caring communities have higher scores than comparison schools on measures of higher order reading comprehension.
- Gallo (1989) evaluated research related to empathy training and suggested that being able to empathise through role-play enhances both critical thinking skills and creative thinking:

....the empirical evidence establishes that it is not just moral reasoning  
but reasoning generally which benefits from empathic understanding.  
(Gallo 1989 p.100)

Gallo notes that role taking engenders the kind of mental habits usually associated with astute thinking. Role taking, she asserts, can:

- Help to foster insight into different perspectives and can promote open-mindedness.
- Discourage hasty and superficial problem examination.
- Facilitate the construction of more fully elaborated and frequently novel problem models.
- Discourage belief rigidity.
- Encourage cognitive and personal flexibility.
- Encourage persistent probing, engaged examination of an issue in alternation with flexible relinquishment and reflective distance.

Gallo 1989 p.112 –113

The agreed aim, in using role-play in the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet*, was to encourage the pupils to receive the text in an open minded way, applying different perspectives to an examination of the text. We also hoped that it would encourage cognitive and personal flexibility, while maintaining a reflective distance. This reflective distance had been identified by Heathcote (1984) as we noted earlier, with her emphasis on exploring a character in role, but asking pupils to produce written response later, in the third person.

Whitehead recognised the importance of making action research meaningful to individual educators (McNiff 1988), and he reformulated the action reflection cycle into a pattern of statements which have been particularly useful:

- I experience a problem when some of my values are denied in practice.
- I imagine a solution to the problem.
- I implement the imagined solution.
- I evaluate the outcome of my actions.
- I reformulate my problem in the light of my evaluation.

Working with Ms B., our first task was to agree on the problem and to formulate a possible solution.

### ***Recognising the Problem and Formulating a Possible Solution***

The pupils we had been asked to work with had been selected for us by the senior management of the school (previously referred to as School B). We did not perceive this in itself as a problem, but my research diary indicates anxiety about the cognitive expectations, which were still applied to the pupils, and our ability to match these using the active learning methods we had discussed. “It’s just the time factor really.....it takes them so long to settle down.....we might never get to the point where they write about the play.....and at the end of the day that is the outcome which is going to be

measured against a national standard”, (verbatim quote from Ms B.). Fears were expressed about keeping the pupils on task and maintaining order. We decided to adopt as a general rule, a classroom approach that recognised that while engaged in role-play, or any active learning, empathy as a response to them was desirable, but may not always be appropriate. This was an attempt to recognise that empathising with a pupil may not always be in the best interests of the whole class:

The most important thing (about empathy) is when to use it. When the teacher and student can engage in dialogue that does not violate their individual rights or the rights of others, then empathy is appropriate. However, when either a student or another person is attempting to engage in a dialogue that is disruptive and violates the rights of the teacher and or students, then the teacher needs to be assertive and bring the class back to order.

(Huitt 1997 p.1)

Cooper (1997 c), recognised the difficulties of using empathy either as a teaching tool or as a modelling tool. She pointed out that the kind of relationships described by Rogers assumes a one to one relationship, and that this is very rare in teaching. The possibility of deep personal relationships in classes of even twenty is much less practicable. Empathy then must be limited and it may be that Rogers (1975) concept of entering every private individuals perceptual work and becoming at home in it is unrealistic in a classroom. Cooper believed however, that teachers should be able to prioritise their energies and to demonstrate empathy using rapid affirmation and brief conversation (Cooper 1997 c).

Such discussions focusing on classroom discipline were helpful in establishing the working relationship with Ms. B. who expressed relief that assertiveness in the classroom was not forbidden. We recognised that as a principle, order must be established and expectations about behaviour must be set at the beginning.

A further problem was expressed when we came to talk at our early meetings about evaluation. Clearly, we were looking at the effect of using empathy as a teaching tool in the presentation of some literary material. We agreed that there might be a place for some written response to the play, which may be useful in trying to establish whether the pupils were cognitively engaged. However, we also agreed that this would be produced late on in the programme: "This would give us some distance from the written task –might increase the enjoyment factor" - Ms B. It also meant that we could be more flexible in establishing our end product, allowing the knowledge to be evolutionary, (Watts and Bentley, 1991). The immediate and ongoing evaluation would be based upon engagement with the tasks set, and we devised a simple scale to help to measure involvement or engagement. This scale was developed from Aspy's work, *Towards a Technology for Humanising Education* (1972), Chapter 8, Student Involvement. In adopting and adapting the scale, we agreed that pupil attention is related to learning (in a positive sense) and that inattention is related to learning (in a negative sense). Ms B. expressed the view that: "Attention can be taught....by creating a positive environment with high expectations where empathic responses are the norm.....children will come to expect to pay attention".

We agreed on five levels of involvement as follows:

- Level One - Lack of involvement. Dissatisfaction with activity expressed. Unrelated remarks are made.
- Level Two – Pupil participated for 50% of the time. Some remarks may be about the activity, followed by an unrelated comment. Mild dissatisfaction may be expressed.
- Level Three – Pupil participated but only within the prescribed rules. Pupil goes along with the task. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the activity.
- Level Four – Pupil participated enthusiastically, but sticks to rules established by teacher. All of the responses are related to the class activity, and the pupil seems to enjoy it. May express mild satisfaction with the activity.



- Level Five – Pupil participates enthusiastically in the class activity and goes beyond the established rules. Strong satisfaction evident in the exploration of new ideas. (See appendix 3)

In order to use this scale effectively in the classroom, we agreed that we would each record the responses of the children in our own group, and we agreed that responses would be recorded against the pupil initials in our scale. The time of each response was also recorded. The research diary indicated that Ms B. was particularly keen to make sure that while using role-play, we would also be engaging the pupils cognitively by asking them to understand the consequences of their feelings, rather than simply reflecting on or responding to the said feelings: “So what happens then if you can’t stop being angry – what happens to you – what happens to them – we can ask them to think about that.” This would seem to be similar to the concerns expressed by Weinstein (1969), in which he identified the importance of prediction to understanding.

One of the consequences of this early concern to identify cognitive empathy was the agreement to begin looking at the play through the written word, in the early stages of our work with 8J. I agreed that preliminary work to the role-play would offer the opportunity to get to know the group and therefore establish the boundaries of behaviour, allowing empathic responses to develop.

### ***Specific Research Methods and 8J***

The discipline of evaluating views on action research and identifying its usefulness for this work has been very important. The appropriate use of action research in terms of my own research has been identified. The methodology of action research is particularly attractive, as the spiral of self reflection on the activity, should allow maximum flexibility in the programme, which we saw as evolving over the term. Our methodology would enable us to observe to what extent Gallo’s mental habits (1989) are fostered by the use of empathy.

- All lessons were planned collaboratively with Ms B. This presented us with the opportunity to identify the problem we were wanting to address, and to begin to imagine a solution to that problem, (McNiff 1988). The planning stage of our work allowed us to formulate the questions:
1. Does role-play (using empathy) lead to increased engagement with a text (improved attention)?
  2. Does role-play help to foster an understanding and appreciation of the different strengths that characters exhibit?
  3. Can the teacher establish and maintain control within the classroom?
  4. How do we evaluate pupil engagement (attention to text and task)?

Planning sessions were recorded in a research diary, in which verbatim comments were recorded and later reflected upon. This gave valuable insight into the constraints that operate on teachers even in a school sympathetic to using active methods to engage the interests of the pupils. For example, there is a repeated emphasis on a written response as an end product, and an anxiety about Key Stage Three testing, even though we were working with a year eight group.

- Informal interviews were undertaken, following each session in which empathy had been used. These interviews were not structured in any way, but they focused on the evaluation of the process. The interviews took place in the classroom, or the activity area, so that we could remember additional incidents based on classroom incidents and where pupils were located. In other words the classroom itself became an aide memoir.
- During each session pupil responses were marked against their initials as indicated in our attention scale.
- Field notes were written up at the end of each session forming an unstructured log.
- As the work with the class was designed to be collaborative, such recollections were checked against the recollections of Ms B. for accuracy and thus to improve validity.

- The collaborative nature of the research also meant that brief note taking during sessions was possible and points of interest, focusing on pupil interaction with the teacher and between pupils were noted. These points of interest would form a record of observation i.e. the commentary was added later, after the session, and provided the opportunity to apply interpretation. It is important to note that no observation is entirely free form interpretation (Open University, Methodology Handbook E621, 1991 p.68). The very focus of the observation will imply an interpretative framework.

The purpose of the field notes was to focus on the empathic response of the pupils. These sessions were planned to make use of active teaching methods, which would build up to an empathic response. Some of the early active teaching involved empathy, and pupil responses and engagement was noted. The end product of the sequence of lessons was to be an empathic response, in role to the mask scene of *Romeo and Juliet*. The active approach which led up to this involved a variety of approaches, in which controlled participation was encouraged (Stredder, 1997). Working with the class over a term for one lesson a week, we introduced teaching strategies which involved brainstorming ideas, group work, paired reading, hot seating and looking at short video sequences. It is important to note that empathy at this stage was seen as the culmination of the work already carried out, or as Ms B. said: "it will give them that added depth which they need to really understand". The later sessions were planned using empathy as a central teaching tool. We were particularly interested in Heathcote's use of empathy in which pupils are brought out of role for discussion purposes. The nature of the empathy and the response to it was observed and the informal interviews were intended to explore both the child's feelings during each session, and the learning experience (the cognitive understanding) after the sessions. We were also aware that in order to use empathy effectively as a teaching tool, we would need to provide an empathic audience (Hogan 1975), and noting Cooper's (1997 a,) list of empathic responses (teachers smiled a lot and looked happy, they listened to the children and talked to them, they used their first names a lot and responded positively to their attempts to work), we deliberately tried to achieve that model of an empathic relationship with the group in the early stages of the work.

The validity of this work rested upon two main features. The acceptance of me as a collaborative teacher within the class with equal status to the class teacher and within the wider school, and respondent validation. The feedback sessions were planned so that all children involved could be included. There was also the opportunity for some triangulation. Working regularly with the class over a term should ensure that reactivity was minimised. I also felt it important to be seen as a presence around the school outside of the allocated weekly session, and helped to supervised exams and National Curriculum testing with this in mind. Pupils were therefore familiar with me, and able to refer to me by name, rather than using the “Miss” which is common practice in the school. Respondent validation was ensured because the work was collaborative and the opportunity to obtain feedback from the pupils was integrated into the programme. The use of and the sharing of field notes and recollections were attempts at simple triangulation.

### *Year Eight*

The teaching process extended over a term, using one lesson a week, each Friday morning. During the term we worked collaboratively with the class looking at a variety of literary texts and using an active (though not necessarily empathic) approach to teaching. The early weeks were important in order to establish the collaborative work, and to establish the teachers as facilitators.

8J were chosen for several reasons. They were a lower ability class and this meant that : It was a relatively small class with twenty-two pupils. This meant that the group could be divided easily into working groups of eleven, which we both felt was attractive in terms of establishing an empathic relationship as described above with the pupils. There was also a good gender split in the group, and while gender was not a central issue for us to begin with, we were aware that recent research indicated significant differences in response to empathic teaching methods. Research indicates that females of all ages

exhibit higher levels of empathy, particularly affective empathy (Barnett 1982, Siegal 1985).

8J were also used to an approach to education through drama. The group had been working each week with a drama teacher, and was therefore used to role-play both within English lessons and without. The class had recently worked with the teacher during lessons on the history of the Second World War. We believed that this would make the class more receptive to the empathic teaching approach to literature that we wanted to explore. There is an assumption, from the literature, that empathy can be acquired and that pupils can be trained to empathise with each other and with problems or actions read about in literature. Rogers, (1975), believed that anyone can be trained to become more empathic. Recent research would support this. Black and Phillips (1982), working with older students, explored the idea that training in interpersonal perception and empathic responding (a cognitive approach) enhances students empathetic perceptions and skills. His research also indicated that children can be trained to focus on the similarities between themselves and others, and that this is effective in increasing affective and cognitive empathy. Interestingly, role taking or playing was recognised by Black and Phillips (1982) as effective in increasing both affective and cognitive empathy, and is cited as a specific method of training children to become more empathic. Role-play in this study was defined as any activity which calls for children to assume the role of a real or fictional person and to imagine or act out that persons feeling. According to Black and Philips (1982) increases in empathy are evident even when children are asked to imagine the point of view of an animal or inanimate object.

Another advantage of working with this particular group was that the Headteacher was very keen that we develop a collaborative approach to their teaching, as he saw the opportunity for such teaching to be a positive experience for the group. Discussions indicated that the Head saw this in terms of class control. In a simplistic sense, two teachers had to be better than one, when dealing with an “uncooperative group”. While this class had proved uncooperative with some teachers, it is important to note that not all recorded this. Some teachers liked the group and described them as responsive. The

Headteacher also expressed concern about using the older, equivalent group, as they would be taking Key Stage Three tests, and he clearly saw our active approach as taking precious time away from the development of basic and higher order cognitive skills (Cotton 1997).

In working with a group of twenty- two children, perceived as of limited ability, there are limitations in the generalizability of the research. It is not an accepted absolute that generalizability is important in this kind of action research. Denzin, for example, believed that every topic had its own sense of order and meaning and that generalizability is not an issue (Schofield 1993). However, it is important to establish a common understanding of the importance of generalisation as a goal. It has been suggested that underlying qualitative approaches of any kind is the assumption that such research is influenced by the researcher's individual attribute and perspective and the goal is not to produce a standard set of results which can be replicated (Schofield 1993). Where researchers take many months or years on a case study of a very small number of cases, generalizability is not likely to be possible, but we can still develop a concept of generalizability. Guba and Lincoln talk about fittingness rather than generalizability (Schofield 1993). They argue that this places the emphasis on analysing the degree to which the situation studied matches other situations is a more realistic or at least workable way of thinking.

All planning sessions took place during lunch times in the school and we adopted as a general principle that the planning sessions would take place the day before the lesson, and build upon the previous lesson. We used Ms B.'s classroom as she did not have a tutor group to manage and the classroom was not used outside of lessons. The lessons were planned collaboratively.

### ***The Task for the Pupils***

Work with 8J was carried out throughout the summer term. The sequence of lessons, which formed the focus of this stage of the research, was after the half term holiday. The

lessons at this stage were planned to make use of empathy, and the pupils were expected to work in role. This was appropriate since one focus of this stage was the pupil experience of empathy. The focus was on empathy as a process, rather than a stage (Rogers, 1975) and recognised the multifaceted nature of the process (Gladstein 1983). The application of a scale of engagement or attention, was an attempt to focus and formalise observations.

A further focus for this stage of the research was the empathic nature of the pupil/teacher relationship and the influence this may have on the use of empathy as a teaching tool in literature. We felt that by concentrating on building an active environment that encouraged empathic listening and responses, the ultimate work in role might benefit. This is important in the light of recent research (Cooper 1997 c,) which indicates that empathy is more than a superficial awareness and connection. It needs to be determined and persistent, and it involves looking for the positive in pupils. The characteristics of an empathic approach to encourage empathic responses would include:

- Responsive and sensitive listening to pupils.
- Explaining the effects of distraction behaviour on others.
- Pointing out that they have the power to make others in the class happy and comfortable.
- Teacher modelling of empathic, caring behaviour.
- Encouraging children to discuss their feelings.

(Cotton 1997 p.9)

8J were classified as a lower ability class, but within the group there existed a wide range of ability, as would be expected. It was made up of twenty-two pupils, thirteen boys and nine girls. They were generally believed to be a disruptive group. One member of staff said, "Oh, poor you", when she was first told of our plans to work with them. It might be useful to note however, that several members of staff, including the drama teacher, expressed faith in, and a liking for the group. One of the boys from the group had recently auditioned for a role in the film of "*Hard Times*" which was being filmed in the

North East of England at the time and he expressed a liking for English. All children in the group can be categorised as white, and within the group there were four children who have been in the care of the local authority in the three years prior to the research, and one girl who had been subjected to abuse by a step father (prosecuted and jailed for the offence). This is relevant as research carried out by Morgan (1983) has indicated that structures congruent with empathy enhancing activities are most beneficial to socially disturbed or abused children. Morgan studied the relative effects of a humanistic model and a behavioural model. The former was characterised by a focus on how behaviour effects others and role-play, and was related to greater empathy, responsibility and self control than the latter.

Our sequence of lessons involved working with *Romeo and Juliet*. We chose this text because at the time of the study it remained the schools choice for study at Key Stage Three, and it is a text commonly associated with an empathic approach to its presentation. Indeed, Key Stage Three tests for 1999 asked the children to *"Imagine you are the Nurse. Write your thoughts and feelings as you think about the day's events. You could begin: This afternoon my Lady Juliet married her love, Romeo. I am glad I have played my part in helping them....."* (DFEE, Key Stage Three English, 1999) It specifically asks pupils to respond in the first person: *"Remember to write as though you are the nurse."* It should be noted of course, that at this stage, the intention was for us to follow the Heathcote (1984) model, in which any written work, and much of the discussion occurs in the third person, thus allowing some distance from the events. Heathcote's work with children clearly used both the affective domain and the cognitive domain, and allowed the children to respond in role through imitative imaginative or contagion empathy, and then move through a cognitive process when responding to a text out of role. In Chapter Two, I identified the point at which teachers move children in and out of role as crucial in terms of the learning experience.

The timing of the lessons was important, since the stage area and large hall were always available from 11.15 –12.15 each Friday.



We decided to try to get the pupils' interest by giving them some ownership and control over their learning by allowing them to select an interesting part of the text to work with. Earlier work had allowed us to establish an empathic relationship with the pupils. We focused on two scenes, the ball, during which Romeo first sees Juliet, and the fight scene in which Tybalt is killed following the death of Mercutio. We selected these scenes because we believed that they displayed emotions that the children could identify with. We were aware of the dangers of over identification (Gladstein 1983) which could make it difficult for children to move out of role easily, and the unreasonableness identified by Hogan (1975) in asking children to express and understand feelings that they have not experienced themselves. For example, it is unreasonable to ask children to empathise with Juliet after she discovers Romeo dead, because they will not have encountered the extremes of passion expressed by the character. We felt that in the two scenes we offered, we had a reasonable gender mix (though we recognise that this was limited in the case of Juliet,) in recognition of the work carried out by Blythe (1996) and others on the difficulty for boys in empathising with a female character. Work carried out by Iannotti (1975) would support the claim that the more familiar a pupil is with a situation, the greater the probability of empathic response.

We felt therefore, that it was not unreasonable to ask year eight pupils to reflect on first thoughts and feelings of frustration and anger displayed in the fight scene, and that such feelings would be familiar to girls and boys alike. The pupils were asked to vote on which scene they would like to "present", and they voted fourteen to six for the mask scene, with two pupils being absent on the day. This was very much against our expectations, and it would be interesting to explore why they made this choice. While the exact gender preference was not noted, it was noted that the response was mixed, with some girls opting for the fight scene, and some boys opting for the mask scene. Ms B. commented that they had opted for the "easier" of the two scenes in the sense that there were fewer emotions displayed and fewer characters involved directly in emotional responses.

Pupils were given verbal instructions. They were divided into two groups, theoretically of equal size, but absence meant that they were often imbalanced. The pupils were asked to prepare a presentation for the other group, but the presentation must have no spoken language. We believed that by removing language we would ensure that the pupils were empathising and not sympathising with the characters in the play. Pupils were to explore other ways of presenting their work, which must focus on the mask scene of *Romeo and Juliet*, using characters from the play. The presentation was to last approximately five minutes. The pupils were not asked to enact the mask scene, but to experience it. Masks were provided for all pupils and were simply white, expressionless masks. Ms B. and myself worked with a group each as facilitator. The focus on non-verbal communication meant that children were forced to use an imaginative imitation aspect of empathy (Margulies 1984) as the active quality of entering into another's world. Like Heathcote, Margulies accepted that there is some inner, or universal truth. As we were dealing with scenes that depict very strong emotions, we felt it important to distance the pupils to minimise the dangers recognised in over identification. We also felt that removing language from the pupils would make moving in and out of role easier.

The class opted to work in the hall, but it was interesting to note that once in this large space, they created their own space using old scenery and curtains. This space was small, but seemed to help them to move in and out of role. My group decided to work with music, and they borrowed a CD from the drama teacher: "*The Secret Garden*", and from this compilation they chose a piece called "Ode to Simplicity".

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Findings**

#### ***The Pupil Experience – Can Cognitive Engagement be Identified?***

During the empathic lessons, where children were asked to experience the feelings of the characters, there was an attempt to identify cognitive engagement. Written in to the lesson plan, was the desire to allow the children to take some responsibility for their own learning and to construct their own knowledge. The emphasis was on active, whole-bodied forms of learning (Watts and Bentley, 1991). We were trying to engage the pupils in reconstructing understanding. Our job, as facilitators, was to provide the scaffolding (Wood, 1988) and move the pupils further in understanding external to themselves. This necessarily involved an element of sharing and communication. Role-playing is a skill that requires a high level of cognitive competence (Gladstein 1983), and there was undoubtedly an intellectual component to the pupil response.

The cognitive engagement of the pupils during these lessons was seen to be high, and there appeared to be much more than a reinforcement of the text going on. Pupils seemed to have the ability to move into role as the characters and predict their responses, which led them on to think about what might have happened if the characters had reacted differently. This is interesting in view of the early work on teacher perceptions of empathy, which indicated that empathic learning techniques were used mainly to reinforce learning which had taken place in a more conventional learning experience. The pupils were seen to take control of the situation “Ms B. “– we want you over here please” was typical of the instructions which were meted out to us as facilitators. The groups decided themselves on how they would present their work, and my group asked

the other group and Ms B. (and indeed myself) to sit down at a round table. In this way the entire group became participants in the action and the group decided this themselves, without interference from the facilitators. Each masked character entered in turn and circled the group. Some touched the hands of the group and one joined the rest of us at the table. Each masked pupil entered and adopted a particular “mood”, expressed without words and meant to depict one of the characters from the play. The pupils had to present the mood using body language as their faces were masked. Pupils agreed and negotiated their own characters: “No reason why we can’t have two Juliets – if you want to do that – you do it – Miss.... that’s OK isn’t it – or do we all have to do a different one?” As facilitator I did help the group with which characters to focus on, but the group decided that they needed a Romeo, a Juliet, a Mercutio, a Tybalt, an Old Capulet, a Nurse, a Benvolio and a Rosalyn. There was some disagreement about whether or not Rosalyn should be included, and one pupil made the comment: “It isn’t that she is boring, like she is, but she is just bland – like Jonathon in Buffy (a TV programme popular with the pupils) – how can I show that without saying – Oh I am bored”. Another group member responded to this: “She isn’t bored – she’s stuck up – she *thinks* she is better than the rest – like Juliet – she is *above such* things as love”. This would demonstrate considerable cognitive engagement with a minor character, and indicate that pupils are predicting what might happen. It is interesting to note that once this had been pointed out, the first girl agreed to take on the part with enthusiasm, and portrayed a very “nose in the air” Rosalyn.

Each pupil in role showed evidence of empathy with the characters. They were able to communicate an aspect of a character’s feelings and predict outcomes. In discussions following the sessions Romeo described how he was excited to be breaking the rules, but he was annoyed with himself for meeting Juliet. “If he hadn’t listened to his friends – none of it would have happened! – He only has himself to blame.” This pupil was engaging with the text and trying to predict, in a limited way what might have happened. Both of the Juliets described the excitement of meeting someone: “He seemed exciting – as a what do you call them – a Montague – he must have seemed really dangerous to her – really exciting – like going out with someone from a rival gang – West Side Story!

Hey it's like West Side Story!!!!...." The pupils did demonstrate the ability to assume the role of a character and to predict what might have happened. It is unlikely that the response is based only on matching of emotional responses, (Ionnotti 1975). Key here, is the choice of task. The task has to give the pupils the opportunity to express understanding of the consequences of his/her feeling rather than to simply respond to the said feelings. It would seem that setting a task that is not too far away from their own emotional state may be important.

But the discussion indicated not only a high level of cognitive engagement with the play, the discussion became focused on the effects of wearing masks and how they can alter behaviour. "You can do anything wearing a mask – no one knows it is you – he could have killed him and got away with it!" and "I suppose that is why robbers use masks – or somebody doing something awful – not just 'cos you don't recognise them and get caught, but because you can do anything. It makes you brave and not ashamed." The pupils seemed to be transferring their ideas from the world of the classroom into the wider world, applying their own understanding of it. They seemed to be adding to their own understanding of the world. Once the discussion about "crowd identity" started, pupils were able to relate such feelings to the fight scene, later in the play: "It's like they are wearing masks then, just being stupid in the gang – showing off". This would seem to support the view that there is **high level** of cognitive engagement with the task and that the pupils are attempting to find **truth** through a shared view of the world of the other, (Margulies 1984). The use of the "*It's like*" can be seen to equate to the "*as if*" quality identified by Rogers (1975) as being crucial in empathic role-play. During the role-play sessions and the discussions afterwards, this "*as if*" quality was very apparent. For example, one girl talking of her experience as Juliet: "It was *as if* my eyes were opened for the first time – all the costumes – then this Prince – shining through the crowd". The "*as if*" quality seemed to be sustained throughout the empathic sessions, which would indicate that there is less likelihood of the response being identification. The children moved in and out of role freely, sometimes referring to themselves as the character portrayed, and sometimes talking in the third person. This in itself would indicate that the response was empathic and not identification. It is interesting to note that my working group devised for themselves a system of indicating when role-play had begun,

by pulling back a small curtain which had been left on stage as part of a set from an earlier school production. For discussion work, the curtain was closed, creating a small, dark area, while for “in role” response, the curtain was pulled back. This seemed similar to the use of hoisting football colours in the earlier work on empathy, (see appendix 2) though on this occasion the system was devised, and organised by the group members.

One of the girls of the group, in character as Rosalyn, talked about feeling angry that Romeo had lost interest in her. “Rejected – what’s new!”. It would seem likely that she is identifying how she has felt in the past and assuming that everyone would feel the same in a similar situation. This might imply a process of **generalisation** (Shantz 1975), but the same girl described how it felt to be “above” the others. “I don’t have to prove nothing – I just am – better”.

While the pupils showed a high level of **cognitive** engagement through the empathic role-play, it should be stated that written work produced at the end of the sequence of lessons was very varied. There was evidence of cognitive engagement in some of the work, while other pupils either did not bother to hand in the work, or they failed to engage with the task we set. Our experience at this stage in the research did not support the teachers views expressed in the early work that using empathy would lead to a higher standard of written response, though in some cases it produced pleasing responses. The written task set asked the pupils to respond individually, and at home to a Key Stage Three type question, written in the first person. We tried to minimise the work by asking the pupils to write a short note, rather than a lengthy letter:

*Imagine you are Juliet and you have just met Romeo for the first time. Write a note in your diary to describe how you felt while you were waiting for the ball to begin, and how you felt when you first spoke to Romeo. Remember to think about your feelings. If you want to, you can write about your feelings once you found out he was a Montague.*

Eleven pupils sent in responses on time. Three of them failed to write in the first person, though one of those explored Juliet’s feelings well: “The excitement ended when Juliet discovered he was a Montague – but she could not stop thinking about him. She was

devastated”. One of the pieces written in the third person was very short, and was from a boy who had been very active in exploring Mercutio’s emotions. Ms B. expressed great disappointment in what she termed a low-level response, but the pupil told her he had not had time to finish it because of difficulties at home.

### ***Pupil Experience – Affective Empathy***

The literature indicated that there is agreement that empathy has cognitive and affective strands. Feshback indeed (1975) argued that it is possible to conceptualise empathy as a cognitive product, mediated by emotional factors, or as an affective response mediated by cognitive processes. This is a useful way of looking at empathy, and certainly it is important not to undervalue the affective domain of the process. Aspy (1975) believed that the affective domain must have equal importance to the cognitive domain.

The processes which the pupils went through while using empathic role-play most certainly included an affective empathic response. “I want to kick his head in – doesn’t he (Tybalt about Romeo) – but I was scared of the old man – so I’m boiling.” A girl added, “but maybe he’s sort of relieved as well – I mean, does he really want to fight at the party – he’s not drunk or anything – is he?” This would seem to indicate that there is some transferring of their own feelings and attributing them to others. The Tybalt character seemed to be responding by transferring his own feelings, perhaps even his own experience to the literary character. This would indicate that **generalisation** (Shantz 1975) may be occurring, and the children are **identifying** how they have felt in the past. **Generalisation** can be seen as another component of the **affective** strand of empathy.

Affective empathy seemed to be more apparent in the preparatory work leading up to the empathic response lessons, and this may indicate that it is essential to the whole process of empathy. For example, pupils were asked to consider how Capulet might feel when his daughter tries to resist him. One of the pupils responded “Furious – but that’s just tough isn’t it.....she has to grow up.....He’s a pig.....if my dad says no – then I do it”. Here, the pupil is responding in the way she believed she had responded or her friends

would respond. She is not empathising in the complete sense, and indeed, her sympathy seems to lie with Juliet, which would seem to support the assertion that children can empathise more easily with a situation which is familiar or similar to their own.

Ms B. and I both felt that the use of a modern video had interfered with the purity of the response. We had decided to use the newer production of the play featuring Leonardo di Caprio, even though we discussed the dangers of the pupils absorbing too much from the powerful images in the play. During the video sessions, attention, using our attention scale, was seen to be very high, with pupils working at level four or higher across the whole group. Work following the video however, would indicate that pupils were responding on an **emotional** level (emotional contagion – Shantz 1975) rather than empathising: “God – that’s terrible – she was his only child – I can’t believe they did that in the end – what a terrible ending! He’ll go and top himself.” The pupils were clearly sympathising with the character (Wispé 1968), though the strength of the language used would indicate that affective empathy was involved e.g. “I was furious – he shouldn’t be there”. They also had a tendency to transfer the images to their reading of the play, so that Mercutio became a drug addict for example. “Well he was probably high when he died – he died happy then!” Pupil engagement with the tasks set was seen to be high. For example, during the presentations, the character of Tybalt wanted to display fury. He did this by storming around the table, banging on the table, and thrusting his face into the faces of the “audience”. It would seem likely that he was drawing on his own experience of anger. He was asked about this after the presentation: “Yeah – I thought about me mam when she won’t give me any more money –or she turns the T.V. off”. He seemed to be transferring his own “teen tantrums” to Tybalt, which would seem to be a reasonable cognitive, as well as affective interpretation. It seems likely that work carried out with the pupils before their presentations made empathy more effective, and helped the pupils to move in and out of role. Affective empathy would seem to be an important part of empathy.

### *Empathy and Gender*



Possible differences in how girls and boys empathise, or at least respond to empathy have been documented, and it was one of the most interesting emerging themes from the research at this stage.

Carol Gilligan (1982) asserted that men and women perceive moral problems in a different way, and that the female psychological and emotional make up was very different. Goleman (1995) too, believed that empathy is a particular strength of the female sex, and there are some suggestions that there may be genetic factors that lead women to have a better ability to perceive non-verbal clues. Certainly, in the group I was working with, there was the emergence of leadership, in a rather quiet girl. It was she who insisted that each group member adopt a specific character each, and was insistent that once chosen, they should stay with the character for the duration of the work. "If you try to do more.....then no...none of them will be any good", though it was the same girl who made the decision that there should be two Juliets, showing particular sympathy to the second girl who was evidently feeling left out. This observation may be linked to Morgan's work (1983) on peer tutoring. Morgan's work indicated that pupils who were allowed to assist in the learning of their peers were able themselves to later express increased understanding. While this girl did not become a tutor in the formal sense, she clearly started to direct the group. This girl appeared to be operating at level five on our scale at all times during the empathic response work. She was focused and showed considerable insight. She chose for herself the role of the nurse, and it is significant that no one else wanted this role. Her nurse was a tortured soul, given to wringing of hands and anxiety and discussions later indicated that the girls understanding of the character was sophisticated: "But she.....she mustn't...it doesn't matter what she thinks.....she shouldn't be doing it.....What did she expect to happen?" It is interesting to note that this pupil's interpretation of the character would have made it difficult for her to respond to the Key Stage Three Question discussed earlier (I am glad to have played my part.....). This girl in particular participated enthusiastically in the class activity and was able to go beyond the rules established by the teacher. All of her responses were related to the class activity and she stimulated exploration of new ideas. She expressed strong satisfaction with the activity: "Can we do the fight scene next week?" While this pupil

was the outstanding one in terms of emerging leadership, our engagement scales across both groups indicated that girls were working at a higher level than the boys. The girls were more ready to sympathise with characters and more ready to discuss their own feelings, though the experience of the boys in the class was positive too. Interestingly, the boys were happy to allow the girls to dominate and mete out instructions during the empathic response sessions, while in some of the active preparatory sessions they had been dominant and reluctant to let the girls speak or read. When asked why the boys had allowed the girls to direct the presentation, one boy responded: "They.....she ....knew what she was doing.....I just did like she said". It is possible that the boys recognise that the girls have a more developed empathic response and were happy to let them dominate. This does not negate their own cognitive construction, but it may have implications for the kinds of tasks set for empathic response.

The girls, it should be noted, were quite clear in the inclusion of the boys: "We chose the CD – you choose the track", which may have been because of a reluctance to do all of the work alone, but would indicate a desire to work co-operatively. Participation by all was insisted upon. It should also be noted that it was a girl who manipulated the curtain in one of the groups, to indicate moving in or out of role, but it had been a boy who first suggested it. It is perhaps relevant to note that while the leaders ensured that all pupils participated, the participation was not equal. For example, the pupils who chose to portray Old Capulet and Benvolio, were two of the quietest in the group, and the least inclined to offer feedback, though when directly asked questions they were able to respond in a basic way: "I was worried for Romeo – yes- well, he is my friend". There was noted among this group of boys, some "off task chatter" and a lower score on the engagement scale.

I was unaware at the time, but it should be noted that the girl who had emerged as the leader had been involved in a child abuse court case in which her stepfather was jailed for offences against herself and her younger sister. It would seem from her eagerness to direct, that she enjoyed the opportunity to take charge and put her environment into order. It is of course significant that recent research on education for emotionally disturbed

children indicates that empathy – enhancing activities are more likely to produce positive results, (Morgan 1983). Such a system would be characterised by group meetings, a focus on how one's behaviour affects others, peer tutoring, and role-play. Her response to the character of the nurse indicated that she was thinking in terms of shared responsibility and the nurse had to accept her part in the tragedy: "She was to blame.....of course she was".

It should be noted that more girls than boys handed in their written response. Ms B. and I felt that we had expected too much from the boys and we should have had an alternative title for them. This would have implications for tasks set. One of the girls, who had interpreted the character of Rosalyn, had been seen to engage cognitively with the text during the role-play sessions. Her written work focused on transferring her own dreams and desires, and while it was empathic: "Tonight was the great ball. We all had to wear masks and that was fun. I think I am in love – he is very cute and I hope to marry him soon." The entry to the diary then went on to describe someone called Keith, who was compared unfavourably to Romeo. "Keith had better watch out.....Romeo is a doll". Again, Ms B. was very disappointed with the response, though we both agreed that the girl had displayed high levels of cognitive engagement in the group discussion. Indeed, her spoken work contradicted her understanding as expressed in the written work: "It was like a dream come true – I only have eyes for you kind of thing – nothing compares." This pupil had at all times during the sessions scored highly on our engagement scale, either registering a four or a five.

### ***Co-operative Learning***

Perhaps related to gender and empathy is the development of co-operative learning as the sessions progressed. Examination of our engagement scale would suggest that the more active the activity, the higher the levels of engagement and that this applied to both girls and boys. The more active activities, whether empathic or not, tended to involve co-operative learning. Frick (1995) identified co-operative learning as essential for cognitive development:

Children learn from people around them and their social world. People and the environment are the sources of all concepts, ideas, facts, skills, and attitudes. Cognitive development has its origins in interaction among people in culture before psychological processes representing ideas, event, attitudes, and strategies, become possible. The main (idea) is that cognitive ability is enhanced when children work co-operatively and collaboratively with adults and other children.

(Frick 1995 p.75)

The groups that we devised were decided upon to achieve a gender mix, and a mix of personalities. It would be interesting in future work to experiment with peer choice of groups, especially as classroom strategies and activities intended to promote empathy have identified both co-operative learning and peer tutoring as important tools (Cotton 1997). Our aim in putting together our groups was in line with the thinking of Kohn (1991) and others who have indicated that organising learners into teams whose members differ from one another in gender, ability level and other attributes, can result in greater interaction among these learners. Kohn (1991) commented:

Co-operation is an essentially humanising experience that predisposes participants to take a benevolent view of others....it encourages trust, sensitivity, openness communication and pro social activity.

(Kohn 1991 p.504)

Ms B. was particularly excited about the high levels of co-operation she had noted in her group: "but it was wonderful to see.....she kept asking him if he was happy with what he was doing, and offering help". This was about a pupil who was seen generally to be rather aggressive. In my own group, the emphasis was very much on the co-operative presentation, with all participants having a clearly defined role. It was observed on several occasions that even criticism was accepted during these sessions. "No... you

look **too** happy” (one Benvolio to another Benvolio)... “Do it like this.....bit worried”. The group were observed to actively cooperate on each other’s roles in order to establish and develop the whole. The emerging leader even asked one of the girls to help another girl: “She is not distant enough” (about Rosalyn), and the instructions were accepted. The pupils were asked at the end of the session if they had enjoyed working together. One boy commented “Yeah, well – it’s great doing something like that – like acting – I suppose you have to work with kids you don’t like to get it to work”. When pressed about taking directions from the girls, one of the boys replied: “Well it wasn’t me – it was Old Capulet”, which may indicate that the role-play enables them to work in ways which would not normally be acceptable. The co-operative work was seen as being crucial in the development of the empathic response, though we did not have a control group working individually. It would seem that the pupils in role, were able to respond to the actions of the other characters: “He was so angry – well you just had to laugh – that made him worse”, (Mercutio on Tybalt). It would seem that the pupils own understanding of their own character was supplemented by the understanding of their peers of other characters.

### ***Pupil Engagement***

One of the original focal points of this section of the research was pupil engagement, and an engagement scale was devised. It is very significant to note that the more empathic the response required from the pupils, the higher their scores on the scale. The levels also rose as the task progressed which would indicate that the pupils were becoming more engaged with the text anyway. Even when the scores were low, using our empathic approach and providing an empathic audience, discipline never became a major issue. When the task required a low level of empathic response (e.g. simply read the text) our observation log indicated a low level of involvement at this stage, in spite of the fact that pupils had been asked to “read in role”. Observations included:

- 11.35 J kicks K in Back – immediate verbal response from K
- 11.37 K loudly admonishes J for kicking seat
- 11.55 Romeo loses place again!

The highest levels were achieved when the tasks set were empathic in nature, and this was particularly notable in the empathic presentation task which could only work if all participants played a part and attended carefully. Pupils had been given the objective of staying in role for the whole presentation and it was indicated that this in itself would constitute a success in terms of outcomes. The level of pupil engagement allowed us to move far beyond this, with pupils moving in and out of role during the discussion following the presentations. Empathic role-play was notably higher in terms of engagement than any of the learning activities of the preparation work. Related to the attention of pupils is the idea that the children had enjoyed the task. “Yes – English is great – it’s not hard work – History is good too”. This was an unsolicited comment and would indicate that the pupil had made the connection between the empathic work he had been doing in history and the work carried out in the English lesson. Working in role would seem to offer the pupils the opportunity to enjoy literature without having to be too restricted by a line by line study of the text.

### ***Empathic Modelling***

Ms B. and I had stated from the beginning the intention of establishing ourselves as an empathic audience. We tried to respond to pupils wherever practical in an empathic way, and we applied Cooper’s empathic teacher traits: we looked relaxed, smiled a lot, joked with the children, listened to what they were saying and responded when we could, and we used their names a lot. At all times we moved freely about the classroom contributing as participants or facilitators in the groups. Even when they were being unhelpful, we tried to smile at them and remain cheerful ourselves. We used their first names and responded positively to good behaviour or responses (Cooper 1997 b.). It should be noted that this was not always easy to do, and there were times when it was necessary to be assertive (Huitt 1997). At other times Ms B. and myself noted that the empathy we were displaying was phenotypic empathy and we did not at the time in reality feel empathic to the pupils. Over the course of the sessions, the pupils did seem to respond to

the empathic audience offered. Keeping pupils on task became easier, and engagement with the task increased.

While working co-operatively, children were heard to be caring towards each other: “I don’t think you should do that.....you don’t want frighten people – just touch them lightly – don’t grab”, and on a general “off task” level : “Well don’t worry about it – my brother is always like that – he usually gets it in the end though”.

Rutter (1992) asserted that pupils like to copy teachers’ behaviour:

There is extensive research literature which shows that children have a strong tendency to copy the behaviour of other people, especially in positions of authority whom they like and respect. Moreover, not only do they copy specific behaviours, but they also tried to identify in a more general way with the people whom they follow, and come to adopt what they perceive to be their values and attitudes.

(Rutter 1992 p.188)

Kyriacou too (1986) saw the importance of empathic modelling in terms of pupils learning experience. He saw that pupils could identify and model themselves upon the values of another person. In the empathic sessions, interaction was frequent, and if Klein (1997) is correct, this will have had a positive effect on the relationships within the groups, and off task interaction is also valued.

Ms B. expressed the belief that pupil engagement was highest, when the facilitators responded empathetically. “In the beginning....well – I was worried – I had to shout a couple of times, and here, if you look at the scale- well the attention wasn’t great – the more I shouted the more I lost them. ....What upset me most was that they seemed to think we were boring..... in the beginning..... but I had to shout less and less, and well.....I don’t think either of us raised our voices during the empathic response sessions.” The effectiveness of our empathic modelling was perhaps confirmed during a fire drill in the school, during one of our preparatory sessions where we were working

with the video. The fire drill meant that all of the pupils had to leave the building and assemble in the appropriate meeting point on the top yard. The group (there were nineteen present on that occasion) waited together before dashing out. One of the boys picked up Ms B.'s marking bag and carried it without being asked, and another of the boys counted heads again and confirmed for us that nineteen pupils were present. These are small points but they indicate that the pupils are experiencing an empathic environment, which allowed them to develop and express their feelings without fear of being ridiculed. The lesson interrupted was the one in which we were using the video, and the pupils were anxious to get back to it. While waiting outside, they talked about the video and one girl was heard to comment "She's just carried away – she's too young to be in love". Ms B. who had overheard the comment believed that this indicated a significant step in pupil engagement with the play. During the evaluation session immediately following the lesson, we noted that all of the children were operating above level two on our involvement scale, with the majority of pupils seen to be operating at levels three or four. The pupil responses were related to the class activity, and there was no dissatisfaction with the task expressed.

### ***Key Points***

The research questions we were trying to address were:

- Does role-play using empathy lead to increased engagement with a text?
- Does role-play help to foster an understanding and appreciation of the different strengths that characters exhibit?
- Can the teacher establish, and maintain control within the classroom?
- How do we evaluate pupil engagement?

Our data would indicate that role-play led to a marked increase in engagement with the text. The pupils were taken through a number of processes and it was found that the more the pupil was involved in role-play, the greater the pupils' ability to engage with the text, identifying key issues and character traits. Not only did role-play help to foster an understanding and appreciation of the different strengths that the characters exhibit, the



pupils were able to extend their learning beyond the scope of the play. Pupils were also seen to be constructing their own knowledge using their understanding and interpretation of similar events.

Control in the class did not become an issue. This may have been in part due to the relative small size of the group, but once Ms B. and I had established that assertiveness may be appropriate at times (Huitt 1997), we felt that we were able to provide an increasingly empathic audience. The greater the pupil engagement with the text, the less of an issue class control became.

It is less obvious that pupil engagement can be demonstrated through a written response, and one of the focal points of the subsequent research was the extent to which it is possible to evaluate empathy or the effectiveness of empathy in the classroom. Cooper, (1997 c,) believed that the very nature of empathy and its attributes meant that it is hard to measure, and that it is difficult, even in a long term study to assess the effectiveness of empathic modelling and listening. This is likely to apply to the use of empathy as a teaching tool equally. We can however, make some short term interpretations of our experiences in classroom situations.

Cooper goes on to question to what extent, a teachers ability to empathise with an individual is related to the community, society, cultural position of the school and the values of the community it serves. Clearly this is important, especially as the rationale for working with this group of children included the fact that they were used to empathic teaching approaches, which indicates that as a researcher, decisions are very much influenced by our own assumptions and expectations. It is not only a question of what we decide to research, but also what we decide not to research. Any data gathered is open to interpretation, but the personal nature of the interaction in this instance is likely to have implications for any interpretation of the findings.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Towards a Wider Use of Empathy**

#### ***Reflection***

Having used empathy in such an exciting and revealing way in the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet*, Ms B. and I wanted to see if we could use empathy in a broader sense. Our first priority was to continue to provide an empathic environment, and to continue working in an active way with our year eight group. Research has shown that repeated practice at looking at things through another's perspective is more effective than one off efforts to do so (Black and Philips 1982, Pecukonis 1990). Our own experience indicated that there is considerable effort needed to maintain an empathic relationship with a group of children and sustaining the use of empathy as a teaching tool is difficult. Sustained effort is needed at all times. Aspy, (1972) saw human relationships as central to success in helping pupils to move on and develop:

...the most important component of a humane classroom is the climate created by the teacher. Specifically, the classroom should have a supply of meaningful learning experiences and the teacher should maintain facilitative levels of empathy (understanding) congruence (genuine) and positive regard (valuing toward her students).  
(Aspy 1972 p.118)

We were also very aware of the work carried out by Barnett (1982) which indicated that exposure to emotionally arousing stimuli is important, so we sought to make the literature we selected exciting and interesting for the pupils. We were keen to avoid using only portrayals of misfortune, deprivation or distress which the early research had

indicated was the most common use of empathy as a teaching tool in the teaching of literature. We were also concerned that by using such texts the chances of the pupils **identifying** (Ionnotti 1975) would be increased. We felt that part of the success of our work with *Romeo and Juliet* had been because we selected scenes that did not require the expression of unknown passions, which would make it difficult for the pupils to empathise.

We also wanted to develop our practice in such a way as to avoid disadvantaging those of a particular gender. The literature indicated that at all ages, females are likely to exhibit higher levels of empathy than males (Cotton 1997). Clarke (1984), however, had indicated that over a period of time, sustaining an empathic environment might lead to reduced difference between such empathic levels. We felt that the tasks offered were crucial in allowing each individual to take some responsibility for their own learning. Equal access to interesting characters was seen to be central in our lesson planning.

We felt that working with a year eight class over the term, to some extent meant that we were less constrained by the current emphasis in classrooms on syllabus content:

Such is the need for syllabuses to be covered, for predefined attainment levels to be reached, for achievement in those things which can be easily measured, for focus upon those skills and knowledge which are supposedly of economic benefit that the potential moral seriousness of each learner and the trying to make sense of the world of values one necessarily inhabits get increasingly neglected.

(Pring in Cooper 1997 c p. 11)

We were not however free from the syllabus completely and it was necessary to look at literary texts and characters from suggested texts. We felt that this would avoid the accusation that the work we were involved in was taking valuable time away from the areas that had to be studied for summative assessment. The Headteacher had seemed to

express concern about removing time from the development of basic and higher order cognitive skills (Cotton 1997, Pring 1997). *Romeo and Juliet* was selected because it was still the schools main choice for Key Stage Three testing, and we did not feel constrained by the necessity of choosing a text which was aimed at the particular children. It was a chance discussion in the staff room which led us on to our next major empathic sequence of lessons, using empathy as the central teaching tool.

Miss J., the teacher responsible for teaching 8J for the other half of their English lessons, had been grappling for some time with trying to get the children to write about a piece of literature, expressing their feelings for the text, the characters and events. She spoke in some frustration about the inability of the children to see how the events in the book she was using, *The Machine Gunners*, could possibly have come about. She quoted one of our group as having said “I hate the book, it is stupid”, and when she tried to find out why the girl felt this way, she merely shrugged and said it was totally unbelievable. Another girl had expressed the opinion that the ending was stupid: “All they had to do was to tell someone, and it would be alright”. Ms B. and I were particularly interested as we had noted in our research diaries during the work on *Romeo and Juliet* that one of the boys had written: “If only Romeo had told his dad.....or Benvolio, or even Mercutio.”

This conversation led us to consider to what extent it might be possible to devise a session using empathic role-play to examine the lack of communication between individuals and the consequences such lack of communication might have in some circumstances. The ability to *communicate effectively and understand the feelings of others* has itself been identified as one of the most important prerequisites for successful learners (Cotton 1997, Jones 1990).

Successful teaching involves assessing where the children are in terms of their own learning (Heathcote 1984). We felt that the pupils had reached a kind of plateau in their understanding of the text *The Machine Gunners*, and were indeed resisting any progress. We wanted to encourage the children to recognise other sentiments:

Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference and into the other's. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs and what he expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared for, not on ourselves. Our reasons for acting then, have to do with the other's wants and desires and with the objective elements of his problematic situation.

(Noddings 1996 p.24)

At the same time, we were very keen to broaden our use of empathy and move away from the idea that we were working only with great literary pieces which the pupils would be forced to appreciate. We wanted to make the empathic experience a learning experience in the wider sense, and then return to the literature from the new enlightened experience, as opposed to approaching the literature with a view to using empathy to reinforce the knowledge they had already acquired in the classroom. In this, we were perhaps influenced by the ideas put forward by Noddings (1996), that empathy equates to receptivity and is the ability to share an understanding with those to whom we had previously been less sympathetic to. This has parallels to what Heathcote called her "Brotherhood Code", (1984) in which simple, everyday experiences parallel the experiences of others, enhancing understanding:

Jumping sideways through time and across social strata hanging on all the while to one constant element in the classroom.

(Hesten 1995 p.45)

We further wanted to develop the idea of the teacher/facilitator being actively in role, a central concept of Heathcote in her work on the mantle of the expert and rolling role, which enabled the teacher to enter the drama and direct it from within.

### ***Recognising the Problem***

The original focus of the research included the following questions:

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- What do teachers of English understand by the term empathy?
- What are teacher expectations and aims in exploring literature through empathy?
- What is the pupil experience of empathy?
- How are any outcomes assessed?
- How do we present a text in an empathic way?
- Does empathy lead to increased engagement with a text?
- Does empathy foster an understanding and appreciation of the different strengths a character exhibits?

The focus of this particular stage of the research was on the final two implied questions. We wanted to continue to look at pupils engagement with a text through empathy, but we also wanted to look at empathy in the broader sense of leading to an appreciation of the different strengths a character exhibits. We wanted to broaden the term character to include character of day to day contacts and help the children to apply increased understanding of character to the literary text. Specifically, we wanted to see if using empathy in this way would:

- Help to foster insight into different perspectives and promote open-mindedness.
- Discourage hasty and superficial problem examination.
- Facilitate the construction of more fully elaborated and novel problem models.
- Discourage belief rigidity.
- Encourage cognitive and personal flexibility.
- Encourage persistent probing.

(Gallo, 1989 p112 –113)

All lesson planning was collaborative and this gave us the opportunity to identify the problem we wanted to address. We formulated the following questions, which built upon the work we had done with *Romeo and Juliet*.

1. Can empathic role-play lead to greater understanding and communication between individuals?
2. Can this understanding then be transferred to a literary text?
3. Is increased understanding through empathy accumulative?

### *Specific Research Methods Used*

The usefulness of action research has been established as an appropriate framework for looking at empathy in the classroom. It allowed us to offer and control empathic teaching, and to direct the drama from within. It had allowed us over the term to collaborate in the planning and teaching of lessons, within which we had been able to observe and reflect. Our main aim was to improve practice, rather than to produce knowledge and the action research approach meant that we could be flexible with our teaching, changing settings, situations, or even tasks after reflection on preceding events. In order for our teaching approach to move forward we needed the flexibility which is inherent in the methodology of action research. The immediate concern was to improve our teaching, and therefore the experience for the pupils.

Planning sessions were once again recorded in a research diary, in which verbatim comments were recorded and later reflected upon.

- The technique of informal interviews established was maintained, and informal, group discussions followed the sessions. The use of the working space as an aide memoir had been found to be useful and was continued for this phase of the work.
- Field notes were written up at the end of each session forming an unstructured log.
- The work with the class was collaborative and recollections were checked against the recollections of Ms B. for accuracy and thus to improve validity.

The biggest change to the recording of data was that as we intended to be in role, it was felt to be inappropriate to use our engagement scale, which we had initially intended to develop further, to record periods of sustained empathy. Note taking during the class was also seen to be inappropriate as it was felt that in order to give complete commitment to the role-play, we had to remain in role for the duration of the sessions.

The field notes would focus on the empathic response of the pupils. The sessions were planned to use empathic responses, sustained over periods of perhaps five to ten minutes. The empathic work was not initially related to the text that the class had been studying. The intention was to introduce this later. We felt that this would avoid limiting the learning to a deepening of the understanding they already had. Empathy was used as a starting point, not as a culmination of other active work, and it continued to be a central teaching tool. We continued to be interested in Heathcote's use of empathy in which pupils are brought out of role for discussion purposes (1984). The informal discussions were intended to explore the children's' feelings during each session, and then to relate the experience (the cognitive understanding) to the text. At all times with this group we continued to try to provide an empathic audience for the pupils (Hogan 1975) and we continued to display phenotypic empathy using Cooper's list of empathic responses, (Cooper 1997 a, b)

I felt that as I was now well established within the school, it would be easier to move immediately into an empathic approach, as a considerable amount of trust had been built up with the group. The pupils seemed to enjoy the lessons, and one boy was frequently present for our morning lesson, and missing from most other lessons each Friday.

### *The Task*

The task was allowed to develop as the sessions progressed. As the children entered the hall they were put "into role" as a teenager, a parent, or a grandparent. In my group this meant that I had three of each, and the numbers stayed the same for the sessions on this work. We felt that by putting them straight into role, we might be able to capture their interest immediately. Heathcote had identified this as an important starting point and she frequently used dramatic beginnings to lessons to capture attention. The teachers as facilitators remained in role, but moved around the groups, changing role as necessary. The children were asked to explore how each group felt about the other two, and to finally present some ideas to the full class. Pupils were asked not to use foul language,



and they were told that remaining in role for five minutes would represent success for them. The goals of the lesson were therefore achievable.

Ms B. and I intended to move the children from any understanding of communication/generation problems fostered through the role-play, to looking at the relationships in *The Machine Gunners* and perhaps to return to *Romeo and Juliet* to see if understanding had been further enhanced.

## Chapter Nine

### Findings

#### *The Pupil Experience-Cognitive*

As the work progressed through three sessions, it became evident that it was easier to identify **cognitive engagement** with the text than it had been previously. This seemed to be because we were asking the children to apply new understanding they had gained about relationships to a previously studied text, which was not directly related to the empathic presentation. The role-play itself which we asked the pupils to engage in was directed by us as teachers in role, and required considerable **cognitive competence** from the beginning (Gladstein, 1983), as pupils were put immediately in role and asked to tackle the problem of lack of communication in role. Pupils were able to sustain the role-play, and even in session one there was a high level of commitment to the roles the children were portraying: “Even K is involved – none of the usual whining do we have to do this?” (quote from research diary), and “The whole group are involved – B has remained in role for eight minutes”, (quote from research diary of Ms. B.). the fact that the children remained in role for so long in the first session is a clear indication that the children are using high level cognitive skills and were exhibiting the kind of mental habits usually associated with astute thinking (Gallo 1989). The pupils were seen to become more flexible in their thinking towards the problems of communication:

“I could see.....like my gran felt when I twist my face if she gives us fifty pence – it’s right you know – like Keiron said – They’re not interested unless it’s a fiver – well we’re not – but a fiver’s a lot isn’t it?” Another girl commented: “Suppose she thinks I get enough – what with food and clothes – but I still don’t think a fiver is enough pocket

money - I mean – what can you get with a fiver?” This girl was pressed hard by one of the boys: “But you’re talking a fiver every week – like twenty pounds a month – it adds up”. During the presentation at the end of session two, this boy had made the comment, which he created himself using instant script writing: “I don’t know Bob – They go about with these stupid hair dos and baggy pants.....”

Second “grandparent”: “Aye – heaven help them when they come to find jobs”,

First Boy: “Hey man, I’m talking about our kids – our Mary – with her discos and her Sky TV – the grandbairns aren’t so bad - except it’s fifty quid for a T shirt – but it’s hard for them – now Mary – that lot – they had it easy! We spoilt them for sure”.

This conversation demonstrated considerable insight into how the different generations view each other. These boys seemed to be gaining insight into different perspectives, and certainly moving towards a more open-minded approach, (Cotton 1997, Gallo 1989). They were recognising that the problem was *complex* and *multi faceted*. They were able to *demonstrate* that there is difficulty across each generation in terms of *communication*, and that the problem is made more complex by the fact that one generation may favour another. In role, as a teenager, one girl made the remark: “God, if I have kids, I am going to listen to what they have to say – not just – where do you think you have been –? get your homework done!” This indicated that she was predicting and thinking about what could have been or what might be, again indicating considerable cognitive skills.

In the discussions following the sessions the pupils responded in the third person, whereas when we talked about *Romeo and Juliet*, they had moved in and out of role during discussions. This may have been a result of the teacher being in role, and the children modelling the teacher’s behaviour. During the discussions one boy commented: “Well I am going to try to looked pleased when me gran gives me the bar of chocolate and fifty pence – it’s like she doesn’t want me to grow up and go away – my mam has always said we – me sister and me – is the only thing keeping her going since granddad left and me dad died – I though it was just to make us behave like. But I think it is right – I’m all she’s got”. This was the longest speech out of role this particular pupil had made over the full terms work, and would support Gallo’s assertion that empathy can

discourage belief rigidity. One girl commented: “It must be hard like – you give up your own life to have kids really – don’t think I will bother! I used to feel neglected ‘cos me mam went work – but she probably didn’t even want to!” The pupils were transferring their own experiences of the world to the drama, and being led to a greater understanding of individual feelings, including weaknesses and needs.

The final session involved a discussion of the inability of the children to communicate in *The Machine Gunners*. Here again, the children displayed considerable cognitive skills. “But if only Chas had been able to tell his dad, none of it would have happened – I think that even if Rudi doesn’t die – I think Chas and the others have blown it – how are they going to get over shooting someone?” This comment led onto a short discussion of the James Bulger case in which a toddler had been killed by two young boys. This may have been on the pupils’ minds as one of the boys is currently held in a local secure home, and there had been articles in the local newspapers about him. This transference again indicated considerable cognitive skills: “I don’t think it matters if he stays in prison or not - how can he have a normal life - people will hound him”, to which a girl responded “It doesn’t matter for him – but for the relatives of the murdered boy – that’s what counts – the mother – imagine – every day she probably sees that little boy – that’s worse than prison.” Here the pupils were transferring the ideas they had explored in the various roles into the wider world, and applying their understanding to it. The girl who had been most active in *Romeo and Juliet* as the Nurse commented: “But that’s always true – you have to live with it – Juliet’s mum had to live with the fact that she tried to force Juliet to do something she didn’t want to do and it led to her death – even if Juliet had not met Romeo, she might still have not wanted to marry what’s his name and she might still have killed herself.” This demonstrates complex cognitive skills. The girl would seem to have come to some understanding of a universal truth (Heathcote 1984) through the use of role-play, that choices we make can have considerable impact on the lives of others as well as our own. Her knowledge seemed to be evolutionary, (Watts and Bentley 1991). Once again, the “*as if*” quality (Rogers 1975) is very much in evidence: “It’s *as if* they can’t see us adults – totally involved in getting the stars themselves. *As if* they are blind” This was echoed out of role in discussions about *The Machine Gunners*: “They’re not

stupid kids....it's *as if* they can't see anything but the gun and having a shot at the Germans themselves....." This "*as if*" quality which seemed again to be sustained throughout the work in role would indicate that there is empathy taking place and the children are not just identifying, though clearly the children were able to identify their own experiences in the empathic sessions. It is interesting to note that the drawing back of the curtain was continued for these sessions, even though there was no direct link to *Romeo and Juliet* suggested to the pupils. The girl who reverted to discussing *Romeo and Juliet*, did so without any lead from the facilitators, and this again indicated sophisticated comparative skills, where knowledge acquired looking at one text is transferred to another. All discussion work, which the children referred to as "rehearsal" was carried out within the closed area with the curtain closed, while for the final work, the curtain was pulled back. This did not equate exactly to the previous experience as on this occasion the role-play was introduced from the beginning and preparation work involved empathic in role response for which the curtain sometimes remained closed.

Perhaps the most telling response came from the Headteacher, who was invited to see the final presentation displaying lack of communication across generations with no props or costume: ".....Brilliant - .....mind, now we know what you can do.....I am looking for good exam marks for you!" This was an interesting comment as the Head was clearly impressed with what the children had achieved, but was only able to respond in terms of written work. He did however give each child "house points" in recognition of the "excellent" work they had done.

The major shift in our thinking had been that we would accept the evidence as presented in the oral work and empathic role-play for assessment purposes. This meant that we could be much more flexible in terms of end points. Further work would need to be carried out on test scores and schoolwork to see if the pupils' apparent increased understanding transferred itself into better grades in terms of written work.

### ***Pupil Experience - Affective***

The emotional factors or processes of empathy were easy to identify. There seemed to be some transferring of the pupil's own feelings and attributing them to others. The children may well have been generalising (Shantz 1975) with the children identifying how they have felt in the past and transferring those feelings to the situation: "It's not enough is it? What can you do with a fiver then?" and "It doesn't matter what we do for them (teenagers) – it's never enough – it's not worth trying sometimes." This type of generalisation has been identified in the literature as another component of the affective strand of empathy. The pupil's ability to identify and generalise may have been made easier because the situation they were asked to play out was a familiar one. We deliberately avoided asking the children to portray emotions that they could not have experienced. In the role-play we asked them to engage in, the commonest emotions were: humour ("They have those stupid hairstyles" from a boy who himself had dreadlocks though he is white), sympathy: ("Well – when I'm as old as that I hope they don't leave me standing outside the bingo"), and disappointment: ("they never understand"). They displayed these emotions through: identification ("When I were a lad I were a bit of a handful meself", and generalisation: ("Well I just felt a right idiot – she showed me up in front of all my friends – kissed me on the cheek – well I tried to wipe it off – but I felt like – wet"). It seems likely that all of these elements are needed for the pupils to engage in a truly empathic response and to come to an understanding of how others feel.

### *Empathy and Gender*

We had chosen our task with a view to narrowing the gap between boys and girls in terms of the empathic response. We believed that by building on the empathic experience already established, boys would be able to empathise more freely. We further believed that by presenting them with a task which implied equal status in terms of gender, boys might be encouraged to move more freely into empathy. Carol Gilligan (1982) was relevant here as if she is correct, and women perceive moral problems in a different way, it may be difficult to reduce such a gap, and this may have some implications for teaching

styles for those working with disaffected boys or on raising achievement in boys at GCSE.

From the beginning, we noted a much reduced difference in response between the genders, though the girl who had emerged as a leader, continued to work at a level indicating high engagement, and continued to direct events. The boys moved readily into role and were seen to sustain empathy for as long as most of the girls. Working in role, it was easier for the facilitator to direct the boys and make sure that they remained on task. It was necessary only once to bring one of the boys back to role, but equally it was necessary to remind one of the girls that they had slipped out of role. This did not seem to indicate lower levels of engagement with the tasks, as both displayed high levels of commitment. The boy also expressed pleasure with the activity, and asked Ms B. about joining a drama group. When asked about his likening for this type of exercise he commented: "I like to be someone else – it feels good to be angry when you are not really – it helps to control it when you are." This would indicate a rather sophisticated understanding of role-play, from a boy who was a poor attendee in school generally. Generally, the boys were less likely to sympathise with parents in discussions, and more likely to sympathise with grandparents. One boy expressed a liking for being cuddled by his grandmother, while one girl expressed horror, and described her gran as being "wet and slobbery and very old". (In reality of course, these children would have grandparents in their fifties, and this in itself may have been worth exploring). We did not question the children on grandparent's ages, but Ms B. made the comment: "The grandparent is probably fifty one and very glamorous! – but without exception, the children portray them as **very** old people, more like a great grandparent – television influence?"

The boys were less inclined to let the girls dominate during these sessions, and they co-operated fully with the girls, and it was a boy who suggested that as far as possible they should have partner groupings – indicating a mum and dad/grandma and granddad. The boys were as ready as the girls to relate their empathic experience to the literature studied, indeed at one point they seemed more able to understand the motivation of the children in *The Machine Gunners*: "Well – yeah, but it's **their** project – they want to

prove they can do it – do it without an adult- and they did didn't they?". When it was pointed out that that had been with disastrous consequences he continued: "Yeah, but they did it - they proved that they could."

The girls and boys were seen to work co-operatively at all times. There were no disputes other than those that occurred in role as part of the drama. Participation was noted as being more or less equal with no significant differences between the two sexes. Off task chatter was minimal, but noted in both sexes. The levels of co-operation had earlier been found to relate to how "active" the activities were, and this was supported with this work. The sessions were **empathic** and **active** from the start, and this seemed to make co-operation easier for the pupils. Co-operation itself would indicate well-developed cognitive skills (Frick 1995). In role, we continued to manipulate the groups to achieve a mix of gender and personalities, though pupils were put into role as they entered as we tried to take account of friendship pairings and allow some peer choice. We wanted to encourage peer tutoring as identified by Morgan (1983) and seen to be successful in our work on *Romeo and Juliet* with one of the girls. Ms B. continued to be impressed with the high levels of co-operation she witnessed: "I have never seen boys work with girls so readily – or have so much to say – look at B – he was bubbling with ideas and it was him who kept the talk about James Bulger going so long." It may be that the role-play allows boys to work in a way with girls which may not be acceptable elsewhere, and this in itself would be a useful tool for teachers in the classroom.

### ***Empathy and Disturbed Children***

I had been interested by the response of one of the girls, who was still on the "at risk" register in spite of the jailing of an abusive stepfather, to our work on *Romeo and Juliet*. This girl was seen to be fully engaged with the work we had done, and she emerged as a leader, directing and helping the others in the group. Observing her during her work with the relationships between generations, she continued in her role as leader, slipping back into it as soon as she was put in role, in spite of the fact that she entered the class alone, and did not have any noticeable friend within the group. She was given the role of a teenager, as I was unhappy with putting her into a parenting role when her recent



experience had been so negative. She seemed to be exploring her own isolation in role: “Nobody cares – we can do what we like – they only really care if the police come along, banging on the door, then they sit up!” The role-play seemed to offer her the opportunity to explore her feelings, and she was certainly able to express the belief that communication is central when talking about the literature: “She should have just told...(speaking of Audrey in *The Machine Gunners*) – I learnt that – if only you can tell someone – you’ve got to tell”

Observations of this pupil would seem to support Morgan (1983) in his assertion that a focus on how behaviour affects others and allowing children to use a sort of “mantle of expert” leads to greater empathy and self-control. Her ability to communicate her own feelings and to understand the feelings of others seemed to be enhanced. It would be interesting to undertake further study to see if these skills transferred to other areas of the curriculum.

### ***Reflection and Further Developments***

- One of the main points to stress is that maintaining empathy is difficult, and requires commitment and discipline from the teacher. It would seem likely that the teacher personality is a key factor, since using empathy as a tool for teaching would seem to be related to the ability of the teacher to provide an empathic environment. Crucially, it would appear that it is the ability to display empathy or phenotypic empathy (Gladstein, 1983, Hogan 1975,) which is important, and at all times Ms B. and I consciously tried to maintain an empathic stance using the attributes identified by Cooper (1997 a, b). We smiled a lot, listened to what the children had to say, and we used their names often. **Our work supported earlier findings (Hogan 1975) that what is important is that the carer appears to be empathic, and that it is possible to learn how to do this.**
- Teachers need to decide to what extent they are going to allow the pupils to construct their own learning. Heathcote (1984) was continually asking the same question more directly:

“How many kinds of power must you hold onto, and what can you give away?” Related to this is the assumption that it is not possible to always give an empathic response and indeed it is not always appropriate to do so, (Huitt, 1997). In the early stages of our work it was sometimes necessary to be assertive. It is important to realise that pupil misbehaviour is not likely to be a personal attack, and a situation can be made better by a teacher controlling and or changing his/her behaviour (Frick 1995). Our fieldnotes indicate that this kind of intervention became less necessary as our work progressed, and it seems likely that an empathic approach is related **positively** to discipline and self control. It is not clear whether this is because of modelling teacher behaviour, (Cooper 1997 b) or that an empathic approach to learning encourages **self-control** and **self-discipline**, (Cotton 1997). Certainly, research indicates that modelling empathic actions enhances children’s empathy and their prosocial behaviour, and that such modelling is more effective than simply telling children how to behave. **Role-play and our work with year eight would seem to support this, while equally supporting Morgan’s view (1983) that such a humanistic model, characterised by group work and a focus on the effects of behaviour, can be related positively to increased responsibility and self control than more behaviourist models.** It would seem likely that it is important to establish a working relationship with a group before increasing the levels or amount of empathy targeted during any lesson. Aspy (1975) offered evidence that when the teacher is able to empathise with the children in terms of classroom experience and environment, learning improves. Our work would seem to support this.

- Connected with this, **it would seem likely that to use empathy effectively it is necessary to take a non-judgmental approach.** This was clearly identified by Rogers in his early work on empathy (1975). He believed that it was necessary to lay aside your own self, and that in order to do this a person had to be secure in his own self. Heathcote (1984) also believed that this approach was central if the empathic role-play was to affirm the person in the way she intended:

It is from a non-judgmental stance that the teacher...approaches the lesson. The first task is to establish the teacher child relationship; thereby ensuring initial commitment and a harnessing of the child

drives. This relationship is the crucial element in creating an interactive learning environment.

(Hesten 1995 p.42)

- Instant script writing became a powerful tool in the class, and would seem to act as a leveller across the genders, allowing the boys to respond in an empathic way, and to move in and out of role as freely as the girls. The children were allowed to create scripts instantly and without writing anything down. **This meant that their response was more immediate, and possibly enhanced affective empathic response.**
- The teacher needs to be more than an empathic model, or indeed facilitator. Empathy was effective when the teachers worked in role and directed the action from within. At the very least, the teacher needs to work with the groups developing the action and focusing the questions and learning. **Working in role, and indeed using “rolling roles” (Heathcote 1984) made it easier to select and focus the learning.** The teacher’s effectiveness in role as a leader and questioner seemed to be enhanced and was crucial. The teacher needs to be able to get and hold the attention of the entire group, to focus the group, and give them a commentary to make sense of the events. Our session in which the children were put straight into role when they came into the class could be likened to Heathcote’s shock tactics where she “energised” the children and the action (1984).
- Knowing when to move the pupils in and out of role would seem to be crucial in avoiding the dangers of over identification referred to by Rogers (1975) and it would seem to help to provide the children with some distance in a positive sense (Gladstein 1983). This became important when we came to broaden the pupils learning by moving them away from the text to examine communication, and then back to the text. The pupils were able to explore not only the “generation gap”, and the consequences of lack of effective communication, they went on to examine crime committed by children. It is possible that the children were able to move easily in and out of role, because the experiences we asked them to respond to were familiar to them, rather than alien. It did seem that the more familiar the situation, the more easily the children could empathise. It did seem important to be able to move the

children from working in the present tense to the past tense, discussing their feelings while mainly out of role. This would seem to help to avoid the over identification identified as an undesirable effect. Cotton (1997) believed that the key idea was to focus on similarities between oneself and others. **This research would support that this enhances empathic response.**

- **It does seem that the learning was extended,** and that it did not matter whether the starting point was the literature or an empathic response that then led back to the literature. Either way, the children were able to engage cognitively and to respond to the literature with the knowledge of how individuals felt in a given situation. The children were constantly observed to be predicting what might have happened in different circumstances. There is an impressive body of research that identifies such empathic role-play in a positive way with academic outcomes. Bonner and Aspy (1984) identified significant correlation between student scores on measures of empathic understanding and their grade point averages. Gallo (1989) identified empathy training as important in developing critical thinking and creative thinking.
- **It did seem that the learning was cumulative.** It became easier for the children to move into and out of roles. They were able to sustain the empathic response for longer as time progressed. The learning was not linear, and the pupils returned to cover the same ground, and so reinforce what they had discovered. They seemed to reach plateaux and then move forward again. The learning seemed to be carried over from one session to another, it was not lost, and thus they were able to discuss *Romeo and Juliet* from the perspective of the acquired knowledge on communication. In this sense we can see empathy as a **process** (Rogers 1975) rather than a **state**, and a process which helps the pupils to “**connect**” to the human race.
- **The learning was also collaborative:**

Children learn from people around them and their social world. People and the environment are the sources of all concepts, ideas, facts, skills and attitudes. Cognitive development has its origins in interaction among people in culture before psychological processes – representing ideas, events, attitudes, and strategies – became possible.

The main idea is that cognitive ability is enhanced when children work co-operatively and collaboratively with adults and other children.

(Frick 1995 p 75)

- **Using action research meant that we have been able to remain responsive.** It allowed maximum flexibility in that a chance staffroom conversation was allowed to contribute to the development of the research. In many field settings it would not have been possible to adjust readily according to the situation. The cyclical process enhanced responsiveness, and the researchers were able to capitalise on the understanding developed in earlier stages. The qualitative nature of the data can be argued to be less constraining. Participation in the research would seem to lead to greater commitment (Kosnik 1999). Ms B. talked at length about the benefits of collaborative work and action research. She has said that one of her targets now is to reach the same level of collaboration in any work she does that she did in the empathic sessions. Co-operation between the pupils was also seen as having been enhanced. Working collaboratively has also meant that different data studied from slightly different perspectives were able to lead to a rounder picture of events in the classroom.
- Keeping notes in a **reflective diary** is an effective way of collecting data. The research met the criteria identified by Carr and Kemmis (1986), in that it is self reflective research carried out in a social situation in a collaborative way in order to have the end result of improving our practice.
- **The learning was not seen to be restricted to a particular genre.** The children were able to apply their acquired understanding across a variety of texts. It was seen from the early part of the study that teachers associate empathy with human suffering in terms of its usefulness in the classroom. It is interesting to note however, that the children brought humour to their empathic work themselves. This was particularly evident in the work carried out on *The Machine Gunners* where the pupils used the comic mode to express ideas. It is possible that the children were creating their own distance and thus minimising the effect of **identification** as described by Rogers

(1975). It would be interesting to focus on the comic mode in future work, especially since Cooper (1997) identified the comic mode as the antithesis of empathy, pointing out that lack of empathy is the backbone of much current comedy, with popular characters failing to connect or understand one another.

## **Chapter Ten**

### **Conclusion and Implications for Future Practice**

#### ***Conclusion***

We began by identifying key questions:

- What do teachers of English understand by the term empathy?
- What are teachers' expectations and aims in exploring literature through empathy?
- What is the pupil experience of empathy?
- How are any outcomes assessed?

I have tried to address these initial questions. I have found that teachers' expectations of empathy vary, and that the pupil experience depends on the teacher understanding of the term. Empathy is often misused and teachers have very high expectations of the technique as an approach to literature, often claiming that empathy will add depth to the pupils understanding of a text. They seem to continue to believe this even when they assess written work produced as being of poor quality.

In looking at the pupil experience of empathy we developed the questions:

- Does role-play (using empathy) lead to increased engagement with a text?
- Does role-play help to foster an understanding and appreciation of the different strengths that characters exhibit?
- Can the teacher establish and maintain control within the classroom?
- How do we evaluate pupil engagement?

The study indicated that using empathy does much more than reinforce learning about literature: it helps the pupil to use his/her knowledge and experience of the world to create new and enhanced knowledge which may be applied to situations well outside of the literature. The study indicated that the use of empathy seems to relate positively to good pupil behaviour, either through modelling behaviour, or through greater self-control and that this effect seems to increase as a teacher works with a child or group of children.

Evaluation of the work is difficult, though by recording and noting children's comments it is possible to build up a rich record of their improved understanding. A further area for development of this research would be to continue working in an empathic way with the children, and to see if grades in Key Stage Three testing were enhanced.

It had been decided from the beginning that a qualitative methodology would be devised rather than a quantitative. The exploration of the pupil experience did not readily lend itself to large-scale analysis of quantitative data of classroom interaction. What was more important was the content of classroom interaction. In the early stages of the research, it is likely that the presence of an observer had an impact on the children and their teachers. The normal pattern of everyday behaviour was disrupted, and observations necessarily focused on some events in the classroom and ignored others. It is possible that teachers were more inhibited because they were aware that someone was making notes on their actions and comments, and it is possible that some teachers had spent some time preparing for the observed sessions, over and above the time they would have normally allowed. The children interviewed were only representatives from the whole class and they were selected by the teacher to be interviewed. It is possible that they were selected in order to give a particular view of events. However, these difficulties need to be viewed against what it was that was being observed (Mercer 1991). The focus was on teacher understanding of empathy, and their expectations when asking children to respond in an empathic way to a literary text. The focus was not on classroom management, and if teachers had thought through their lesson plans more carefully, they would be more likely to present a thoughtful response to the problem of what they meant when they talk of empathy. As a researcher I had to:



(a) try to employ observational techniques which will obtain suitable data with the least possible disruption of the processes under observation, and (b) use participants' own views and those of other informed sources to help judge the representative quality of what has been observed and recorded.

(Mercer, 1991 p.48)

The continuing development of an action research approach helped to address the problem of reactivity. Access to the school as a teacher was different from access to the school as a researcher. Over the term of teaching it would seem likely that trust from both the other staff and the children would increase, and that this in itself would help to establish a more empathic environment for the children to work in and respond to. The action research allowed the focus to be on the continuing development of practice, and the pupil response to this.

The **implications** for further research are far reaching. Action research necessarily takes place over a long period of time. Further research could be undertaken:

- As a longitudinal study over a number of years. This would imply that some reorganisation of curriculum might be needed to allow the teacher/researcher continuity with the same group of pupils.
- Case studies of a smaller group of children might be undertaken in order to compare the development of the empathic response to exam grades or even performance in later life.
- The collaborative nature of the research might be extended, drawing into the project more teachers from the same department. This would facilitate the sharing of practice and increase the validity of any findings.
- Work could be carried out with more diverse groups of children in terms of ability and cultural experience.

The implications for practice are also thought provoking. The research would seem to support the Constructivist view of learning and that knowledge is to some extent our own creation, through our own experiences and reactions to the world we live in, and is not given by “an independently existing objective world”, (Glaserfeld 1989, p.7). The pupil response then is not replication of what the teacher does, but a reorganisation of his or her own experience.

- The teacher needs to assess the process which leads up to the final response. Any interpretation is a reorganisation, and implies an awareness of choice. All interpretations need to be valued and recognised as valid.
- Active learning, through role-play and empathy, is a way to present something in a novel manner. The learner is using experiences already built up, and reorganising them or interpreting them. It would seem to be important that teachers build upon the experience of the pupil. Empathy was seen to be effective where the experience was familiar, but presented in a novel way.
- Empathy is difficult to sustain, so children need to be well motivated. Teachers need to be constantly looking for new ideas which will stimulate learning, rather than depending on a “bank” of prior activities. Since the knowledge is constructed from prior experience, each class situation and group of pupils will be different, and each will bring a different perspective to any given situation.
- Teachers need to develop methods of assessing work undertaken in empathic role-play sessions without use of the written word. It would seem likely that assessment will be made more accurate and useful if:
  1. The relationship between the pupil and the assessor is secure. This can be enhanced using empathic modelling which can be developed as part of a staff development programme. Teachers need to be able to display empathy and to provide an empathic audience. It is not necessary for them to be naturally empathic themselves.
  2. The tasks set for the children are within the experiences of the children, or are at least recognisable by them. Children should not be asked to portray or present extreme or violent emotions.
  3. Instructions are given clearly, and order is maintained, even if this means the adoption of an assertive discipline style at appropriate times.

4. Tasks should be seen as meaningful to the pupil. They should build upon their own experience, and be recognisable as relevant.
5. Feedback from assessment can be immediate and oral.
6. Working collaboratively for some sessions makes assessment more achievable across a whole class or group.

While the work carried out in this study was with pupils who were perceived as being “less able”, it was very apparent that these pupils were able to engage in role-play activities which required high levels of cognitive involvement. It would seem likely that such active methods could be applied to children of all abilities. Shlossman (1996) who was committed to the use of empathy for the resolution of conflict was the head of a selective school for the more able child. During the study empathy seemed to encourage children to engage with texts and to go beyond the text, and it would seem likely that children of all abilities would benefit and increase their understanding of texts and the world around them. Increased ability to empathise would seem to be linked with self confident, intellectually lively children. It is also interesting to note that active learning methods including empathy have been utilised recently in training medical professionals, including doctors. Khan and Gee (1999) recognised that teaching has to facilitate learning and that medical educational programmes must inculcate “deep learning”. They define “deep learning” as the trainees’ ability to make sense out of the subject matter. The deep approach is fostered when the process of learning builds upon the trainees existing knowledge and allows the construction of new knowledge. This newly acquired knowledge is then refined. Key to this, is the ability to effectively interact with others, and it is likely that an increased use of empathy would encourage this interaction.

The limitations of the study are also evident in the uniformity of the group we were working with. All of the children were white, coming from areas where there is limited exposure to diverse ethnic cultures. It seems likely that creating a more empathic environment, by using empathic approaches would lead children to be more understanding of cultural differences, though it would be interesting to apply the methodology used to a more diverse group. Shlossman (1996) working with mainly

Jewish children has described how when a new student unable to speak English entered the school, students were given a task which required them to empathise with the student by placing themselves into a similar situation imaginatively in a school in Nigeria. Though his conclusions are tentative, they do suggest that pupils were able to focus on the experience and then to apply what they had 'learnt' to the real situation. Cotton (1997) recognised that an important factor is to focus on the similarities between diverse groups, and this would lead to a reduction of perceived differences.

Teachers need to remember that children respond to a variety of teaching styles and activities, and there are implications for **teacher development**. The study would seem to support the idea that empathy can be taught, and that it is the displaying of the traits of empathy which is important. It would seem to follow then that teacher education programmes should develop schemes which allow student teachers to recognise the importance of the **affective domain** through what Aspy termed "humanism in education", (Aspy 1972). Shlossman (1996) has described how his humanistic approach to teacher development has led to an increased focus on trying to resolve conflict among pupils through empathy. He identifies as crucial that each pupil feels that his/her point has been heard and understood. Teachers need to be able to feel that it is valuable to encourage children to empathise with others, and teacher development programmes need to help students learn how to become empathic listeners and to respond empathically to students. This may mean more emphasis on the presentation of classes and teaching styles, and less emphasis on the content, though of course we have to assume that teachers have a congenial system of knowledge.

A further area of development for student teachers involves engaging them in the process of action research itself. Kosnik (1999) believed that the action research process itself focuses the student attention on crucial questions such as: What is the role of the teacher? What is a student centred class? How much can one deviate from the curriculum? How can learning be assessed? Kosnik believed that action research itself as a requirement of her teacher-training programme, led the students straight into reflection on the process of

teaching and learning. Such an approach would lead students to examine the tools of teaching and to become more flexible in their work.

Perhaps what is most important is that using an empathic approach gives us another tool in our work with children. De Bono (1970) identified lateral thinking as a concept:

The relevance of lateral thinking is that it cuts across the distinction of subject material, and thus does not require the background of any particular subject. Lateral thinking is relevant whether one is studying science and engineering, history or English. the best way to acquire skill in teaching is to acquire skill in the use of a collection of tools which are all used to bring about the same effect – the ordering of reality.

(De Bono 1970 p.148)

In the same way empathy would seem to provide us with a valuable tool to help children to order or reorder their own reality.

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# APPENDIX 1

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## TIMOTHY WINTERS

Timothy Winters comes to school  
with eyes as wide as a football-pool,  
his ears like bombs and teeth like splinters;  
the wit of a boy is Timothy Winters.

His belly is white, his neck is dark,  
and his hair is an exclamation mark;  
his clothes are enough to scare a crow,  
and through his britches the blue winds blow.

When teacher talks he won't hear a word,  
and he snoots down dead the arithmetic bird;  
he licks the patterns off his plate,  
and he's not even heard of the Welfare State.

Timothy Winters has bloody feet,  
and he lives in a house on Suez Street;  
he sleeps in a sack on the kitchen floor,  
and they say there aren't boys like him any more.

Timothy Winters likes his beer,  
and his missus ran off with a bombardier;  
his mama sits in the grate with a gin,  
and Timothy's dosed with an aspirin.

A Welfare Worker lies awake,  
and his jaw's as tricky as a ten-foot snake;  
Timothy Winters drinks his cup,  
and slowly goes on growing up.

During Prayers the Master helms,  
and children less fortunate than ourselves;  
the loudest response in the room is when,  
Timothy Winters roars 'Amen!'

He prays for one angel, come on ten;  
Timothy Winters says 'Amen  
amen amen amen.'  
Timothy Winters, Lord,

*Amen*

# APPENDIX 1

---

## TIMOTHY WINTERS

Timothy Winters comes to school  
With eyes as wide as a football-pool,  
Ears like bombs and teeth like splinters;  
A blitz of a boy is Timothy Winters.

His belly is white, his neck is dark,  
And his hair is an exclamation mark;  
His clothes are enough to scare a crow,  
And through his britches the blue winds blow.

When teacher talks he won't hear a word,  
And he shoots down dead the arithmetic bird;  
He licks the patterns off his plate,  
And he's not even heard of the Welfare State.

Timothy Winters has bloody feet,  
And he lives in a house on Suez Street;  
He sleeps in a sack on the kitchen floor,  
And they say there aren't boys like him any more.

Old Man Winters likes his beer,  
And his missus ran off with a bombardier;  
Grandma sits in the grate with a gin,  
And Timothy's posed with an aspirin.

The Welfare Worker lies awake,  
But the law's as tricky as a ten-foot snake;  
So Timothy Winters drinks his cup,  
And slowly goes on growing up.

At Morning Prayers the Master helms,  
For children less fortunate than ourselves;  
And the loudest response in the room is when,  
Timothy Winters roars 'Amen!'

O come one angel, come on ten:  
Timothy Winters says 'Amen'  
Then amen amen amen,  
Timothy Winters, Lord.

Amen

# APPENDIX 1

---

## TIMOTHY WINTERS

Timothy Winters comes to school  
With eyes as wide as a football-pool,  
Ears like bombs and teeth like splinters;  
A blitz of a boy is Timothy Winters.

His belly is white, his neck is dark,  
And his hair is an exclamation mark;  
His clothes are enough to scare a crow,  
And through his britches the blue winds blow.

When teacher talks he won't hear a word,  
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The Welfare Worker lies awake,  
But the law's as tricky as a ten-foot snake;  
So Timothy Winters drinks his cup,  
And slowly goes on growing up.

At Morning Prayers the Master helms,  
On children less fortunate than ourselves;  
And the loudest response in the room is when,  
Timothy Winters roars 'Amen!'

Come one angel, come on ten:  
Timothy Winters says 'Amen'  
Ten amen amen amen.'  
Timothy Winters, Lord.

Amen



## EMPATHETIC WRITING (WRITING FROM ANOTHER'S POINT OF VIEW)

According to the writer Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, 'You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view - until you climb into his skin and walk around in it'. This idea is very important in the study of English. Frequently we are asked to consider things from another person's point of view - to think about their thoughts and feelings on a particular situation.

In order to do this properly these guidelines should be followed:

Write in the first person ('I').

Give an account of the events as they occur.

Try to identify the feelings of the 'I' of the piece - the feelings might change as the passage/poem progresses.

Give plenty of detail.

### SK

**Mid-Term Break on page 38. Imagine you are the boy in the poem. Explain your account of the day and describe your feelings about what happened. Write about 300-400 words.**

---

### MID-TERM BREAK

I sat all morning in the college sick bay  
Counting bells knelling classes to a close.  
At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying -  
He had always taken funerals in his stride -  
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram  
When I came in, and I was embarrassed  
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble';  
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,  
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.  
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived  
With the corpse, stanched and bandaged by the nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room, Snowdrops  
And candles soothed the bedside: I saw him  
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,  
He lay in the four foot box as in his cot.  
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

---

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JK

**Mid-Term Break on page 38. Imagine you are the boy in the poem. Explain your account of the day and describe your feelings about what happened. Write about 300–400 words.**

---

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---

## APPENDIX 2

[Introduced me to a male teaching assistant, who would 'help Mrs J with the lesson'. Mr. B is a teaching assistant employed by the school since Christmas, with the specific brief of developing drama within the school. This is because the school has been awarded lottery money to develop a performing arts centre. Building work is due to start next year. I should emphasise that Mr B is not a qualified teacher, but since it is the pupil's experience of empathy I am interested in, I did not think that this was too important. However, the opportunity to interview Mr B. would have been invaluable.]

### The Lesson

Mr B explained that Mrs J was trying to get the children to focus on the conflict between the two families within the play, and that they had decided jointly on this approach.

The class, 8L was a fairly small one for year 8, with 25 pupils in total, though one was absent on the day. There were more boys than girls - 15 boys - 9 girls. They arrived at the school hall very boisterously, and called out to both adults present in a very disorderly fashion. Both adults ignored this. Mr. B entered the hall first, and then told the children to come in. He immediately divided them into two halves. There was no negotiation. The children fussed a little, girls in particular wanting to be with friends but they were split and moved to opposite sides of the hall. They sat on the floor, and the noise gradually subsided. Mr. B waited, standing between them until the pupils had settled.

He turned to the pupils to his left

'Right you lot here. You guys are Capulets.....and.....' he removed a black and white shirt from a carrier bag and threw it at the group 'and you support Newcastle United - Come on then' the group cheered loudly, though several of the boys muttered unhelpfully - complaining about the football team. Mrs J responded 'just for today Jason.....'

The other group sat silently and if anything a little anxiously.

'You lot.....You are the Montague's, and you support.....' Once again he dipped

M7101250

into the carrier bag and produced a red and white shirt 'Sunderland'. This time the cheers from the group were matched by equally loud boos from the Capulets.

'The rules are simple - you are not actually going to fight' (loud boos) 'but you can think about it (cheers)'

'Each group - I can't go on until you are ready - each group - needs a leader. That's the first thing you have to do - choose a leader - not Romeo or Mercutio or Tybalt - you're just a bunch of young kids - Capulets here, Montague's here, and you need a leader'

This was a little fussing as children clarified this - asking if they had to be Romeo - or who was Romeo. Mrs J. moved between the groups responding to queries.

'The next task.....Joanne, listen.....the next task is for you to talk about why you hate the others.....You sit.....over here.....in Planet Hollywood.....and you can see that lot (Capulets) over there sitting on the grass talking. You're talking about why you hate them, and what you are going to do about it. Everyone clear - OK - first task choose a leader.'

the two football shirts were 'hoisted', by Mrs J and Mr. B onto the windows, and attached there.

This was a very difficult class to observe. A video recorder would have been in the most effective way of collecting data for analysis in this case. In the event I decided to stay with the Capulets. They stayed largely on task in choosing a leader, and it was very quickly decided with minimum of negotiation. 'Peter....Peter's the leader' It seemed the Montagues moved as quickly in the selection of their leader as the groups quickly moved on to the cafe situation. Much time was spent in placing themselves appropriately and there was much debate about how their swords would have lain. Peter was quick to ask for clarification 'Miss - do we have s words or are we like in modern dress?'. Miss J was amused 'modern dress will do nicely'. Mr B worked with the Montagues and Miss J remained with the Capulets.

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At first she simply directed the conversation, as a group member. 'Look at them out there

I don't think that they should be allowed to sit there'. the Children quickly warmed to their task.

'No - they look smug'

'Well, we could go and stuff them' ('Sir said no real fighting' from a girl)

'Did he say we couldn't throw things at them/

Miss J - 'Why don't we like them again'

'They smell.....They don't like us.'

'And they support Sunderland.....Sunderland's crap'

Mrs J 'Watch your language please - how do we know that they don't like us?'

'Cos they always try to fight with us - we don't do nothing - they pick on us'

They hate us - cos we support Newcastle and they think they are as good as us - when they're not.'

'They've got more money than us'

'They have better shops' (This was greeted with laughter 'We're not talking about the places you know!')

Of the group I was observing at this time all participated in this apart from one boy, who sat seemingly relaxed, but with nothing to contribute. It was some time before I realised that the boy sitting quietly had been selected as the leader!

During a lull in the conversation Mrs J said 'Well, this could just be a rumour, but I hear that our cousin (Juliet) is going out with one of them'

This was greeted with dismay and jeers from the group.

'We should teach her a lesson'

'Give her a thrashing' It took Mrs J. some time to deflect the pupils from this course of action and to turn their attentions on how to separate the two.

10 minutes before the end of the session, the children were brought back to order. The ending of the roles was signalled by the pulling down and the collection of the two football tops.

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Towards the end Peter offered the rather perceptive insight 'It really doesn't matter, cos there is no reason - it just is - and they will make things up to show why they hate each other - like at Newcastle - everyone talks about how the Sunderland fans bite your ears off - but I don't think they do - but like, when you are with a lot of others who are saying it - you do believe it.'

Another, quiet girl offered

'Its because they are young - you can tell old Capulet has had enough of it all - he's kind of growing out of it'.

Both Mrs J and Mr B seemed very satisfied with the outcomes of the lesson. they had responded empathically to the pupils throughout the lesson, using Cooper's signs as derived from her own observations ( They looked relaxed, smiled a lot, said some funny things, listened to the children and responded, always used their names). There was no written task set following this lesson.

### **Feedback from the children**

I was invited to select 4 children, and I asked 2 girls and 2 boys to stay behind.

I asked what they had learned about the Capulets. Responses were varied and interesting

'They are stupid, but the families aren't all that bothered - its the rest that fight - like at football - you don't very often see teams hacking each other!'

I think that they just like to fight - it's fun - it's amusement

'If they were alive today they would probably be taking drugs or something' the more specific question of have you learnt anything about Romeo or Juliet was met with much less confidence

'Well.....I think they are like the families - not that bothered.'

They all agreed that they felt most sorry for Romeo and Juliet 'Even more than Tybalt and Mercutio?'

'Oh year, cos they were to blame'.

They were asked if they enjoyed the lesson.

The answers were emphatic

'Yes - its always good when Mr B comes in'

'English is good anyway - 'cept I don't like writing poems.....or reading them'

'Next week we are going to watch a video of the fight where Tybalt gets killed -so we might not have to write anything then either'

'I've liked Romeo and Juliet - but I don't like it when we read it from the book like, I like to see the video.'

I would have liked to interview Mr. B but I was only given the opportunity to speak briefly to both teachers.

I asked what the aims of the lesson had been.

Miss J ' To get the children to understand the mindlessness of the feud, and to realise that Romeo and Juliet are helpless in the face of the hatred' Mr B added ' and to help them enjoy the text - that's important too, though they are not reading the whole play, only looking at certain sections and watching it.'

I asked about assessment of the lesson. While children were being informally assessed, there was no written outcome for this lesson. It was anticipated that the pupils would be able to demonstrate higher levels of understanding when they produced a written response later.

### **Was it Empathy?**

The children were clearly engaged with the task, and there was little evidence of lack of participation, though children did not contribute equally.

### **Appendix 3 The Engagement Scale – utilised during empathic lessons and adapted from Aspy, (1972).**

Level One – indicates a lack of involvement. Dissatisfaction with the activity expressed. Unrelated remarks are made.

Level Two – pupil participated for 50% of the time. Some remarks may be about the activity, followed by an unrelated comment. Mild dissatisfaction may be expressed.

Level Three – pupil participated but only within the prescribed rules. Pupil goes along with the task. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the activity.

Level Four – pupil participated enthusiastically, but sticks to rules established by teacher. All of the responses are related to the class activity, and the pupil seems to enjoy it. May express mild satisfaction with the activity.

Level Five – pupil participates enthusiastically in the class activity and goes beyond the established rules. Strong satisfaction is evident in the exploration of new ideas.

The time that the observation was made should be recorded in the appropriate box beside the pupil's name.



Initials of

Pupil

[illegible]

**Level:**

one

two

three

four

five